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MASQUES OF CUPID

EVANGELINE WILBOUR BLASHFIELD

gift of

Dr. Hugh Moran

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MASQUES OF CUPID

MASQUES OF CUPID

BY

EVANGELINE WILBOUR BLASHFIELD

A SURPRISE PARTY
THE LESSER EVIL
THE HONOR *of the* CREQUY
IN CLEON'S GARDEN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
EDWIN HOWLAND BLASHFIELD

NEW YORK
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TO
CHARLOTTE B. WILBOUR.

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MASQUES OF CUPID

A SURPRISE
DEUS
MACHI
PARTY

A SURPRISE PARTY

Scene

A bedroom. Gas turned down. Foils, masks, boxing-gloves, crops, and photographs of actresses on the walls. Left, a French window; centre, a door; right, a small bed and a wardrobe. Left centre, a toilet-table with chair before it. Right centre, an arm-chair. Enter from door centre DODO *and* POLLY *in ball costume.*

POLLY

Oh! Dodo, wasn't it a glorious dance! Do you suppose they'll all be like this one?

DODO, *turning up the gas and going to the toilet-table*

No, they will not.

POLLY, *seating herself in the arm-chair*

Why?

DODO, *removing her opera-cloak*

Because you can't always be just eighteen, and the others will not be your first balls. And then things will grow complicated.

POLLY

How? Do tell me.

DODO, *going to the window*

Ugh! this room smells of tobacco-smoke. Do you mind if I open the window? (*Turning and seeing* POLLY *comfortably settled in the arm-chair.*) You little wretch! you're going to stay for a gossip, and you mustn't take cold. (*Goes back to toilet-table and sits down.*) What a bad glass!

POLLY

You won't find it luxurious here, camping out in brother Harry's quarters.

DODO

It's more luxurious than the prospect of turning out of my own room at seven o'clock for the man who is coming to take up the carpet. Here, in this hermitage at the top of the house, I can sleep late undisturbed and dream of your triumphs.

POLLY, *making a military salute*

I feel like a recruit who is praised by a veteran; but my success is all due to *your* manœuvres.

DODO, *taking off her gloves and putting a silk bag, containing keys, tablets, etc., on the table*

I've had experience enough to give you a fair start. I didn't introduce you to any intellectuals, or to any men who understand only the theory of waltzing, did I? Generally, I

hate chaperoning girls, because they always want to go home before I do. Apropos of girls, did you see that odious Minnie Anderson whom Harry is so crazy about? No? I wish that he had been there with us. She was flirting vigorously with Dr. What's-his-name, and looked very plain in an unbecoming gown. Dear Harry! how he would have enjoyed himself! Well, all is for the best, for if he were here instead of lobbying in Washington, I couldn't borrow his room for to-night.

POLLY, *leaning back in her chair, thoughtfully*

Dodo, what was that you said about things growing complicated at balls?

DODO, *impressively*

I meant that when you are really launched you can't enjoy yourself in a simple, natural way; you have lots of preoccupations. For instance: if Arthur takes you home you give Reginald a flower; if you sit out a waltz with Bobbie, you must sup with Charlie, and if you dance too often with Tom, there's trouble with Dick. It's a severe mental strain to be perfectly fair and to divide honors impartially. And then men say that we have no sense of justice!

POLLY, *sighing*

Dear me! This is mathematics, and I thought it was fun. (*Hopefully.*) But then it won't be so hard for me, as I shall not be as popular as you are, Dodo.

DODO, *rising*

You are an angel—butterfly! (*Crosses to right; kisses* POLLY.) Now flit, fold your wings and go to sleep. Off with you!

POLLY, *rising*

Please, please, just five minutes longer. Besides, I must tell you the adventure I had on the way to the ball, and I want to know what it was you said to Madame Lepic, and—I'm so hungry!

DODO

You shall tell me your adventure later. First, let us go down to the kitchen and forage. (*Stopping and shuddering.*) Oh! Polly, if there should be cockroaches down there!

POLLY

Never mind; I'm not very much afraid of them. It's said that if you don't run away, they will.

DODO

I never had the courage to make the experiment. I love animals, but I cannot extend my affection beyond quadrupeds. Too many legs spoil the—

POLLY

Don't begin to generalize before you tell me about Madame Lepic.

DODO

There's really nothing to tell. The horrid, old thing thinks she can insult us with impunity so long as she does it in broken English. She met me in the hall, and, after she had appraised me with a look, said, before everybody: "*Chère madame*, how fine you are zis evening! Will you permit one little critique? Is not your charming gown too young?" Naturally, I feebly defended myself: "Dear madame, how kind of you to give me the benefit of your experience! Will you permit me, in my turn, one little critique? In English we say a new gown, not a young gown. I've always admired that gray one of yours. How pretty and durable it is! Thanks so much! *Au revoir.*" That was all.

POLLY

Chère madame, will you permit me, in my turn, one little critique?

DODO

Two, if you like.

POLLY

Was it worth while to answer her at all? It isn't like you to be spiteful.

DODO

Right, as usual, little mentor! Killing flies is a poor business. But I was cross. I hadn't heard from Albert for three

days. If he's not going to find time even to *write* to me, I might as well not be married at all. He's always travelling, always working, always starting some grand, new scheme, and never has a moment for me. He's an unknown quantity to most of my friends, and if he were not the kindest, dearest, most generous of men, he would be perfectly unbearable.

POLLY

I cannot hear him vilified! Faint with hunger as I am, I must defend a brother's cause. You will admit that he allows you to go about with any quantity of other men and to flirt *ad libitum*.

DODO

That's because he has such absolute confidence in my discretion. Ouf! I'm hungry, too. Talking hollows one. Bring the matches, and we'll eat up to-morrow's luncheon.

POLLY, *taking match-box from table*

You haven't shown any curiosity about my adventure.

DODO

At eighteen every incident is called by that name. I'll wager that it was a most commonplace occurrence. (*Opens window on left.*) While we are carousing, let's hope this smell of tobacco will go out the window.

POLLY

And nothing worse come in.

(*Exeunt*)

Enter by open window, with many precautions, GEORGE CARRINGTON. *Evening dress, boutonnière, Pierrot costume over his arm.*

GEORGE

I beg your pardon. Please don't be alarmed. I'm not a burglar and I'm not intoxicated. I'm the victim of a witless practical joke, and— (*Looking around.*) There's nobody here. I'm in luck. I hope I don't *look* as much like a thief as I *feel* at the present moment. Well, at any rate I'm not freezing to death on an icy roof, with pneumonia staring me in the face. What fools boys are! Was I as silly only five years ago? I don't believe even then I would have thought it funny to lock a fellow out on a cold night without an overcoat. Now, how am I to get out of this? To begin with, where am I? (*Walks about the room.*) Top floor of a private house, evidently; probably close to the servants' quarters, who will howl if they discover me, and be too scared to listen to reason. Man's room, I devoutly hope. (*Throws Pierrot costume on the foot of the bed.*) Looks like a bachelor's. However, nowadays one never can tell. (*Examining walls.*) Sporty, rather; but then the new woman is inclined that way. (*Picks up cigarette-case on the toilet-table.*) Doesn't prove anything either, nowadays. Might just as well be a girl's. (*Takes up a silver pocket flask.*) Empty. (*Examines a revolver.*) I should call this fine,

rather than superfine. I'd like to borrow it informally, in case my motives in entering the house should be misunderstood. But that's out of the question. I might as well empty it, though. Dangerous, this leaving loaded weapons about. (*Empties the revolver and replaces it.*) Br-r-r. (*Shivers.*) Wish that I could do as much with this. (*Touching the flask.*) Now, what's to be done? I must settle on some plan of campaign. I thought I was in luck when I saw that open French window and swung myself down by it off that arctic roof; but now that I am *in*, the question is how am I to get out again. Shall I rouse the house? That proceeding seems awkward, and might lead to complications. Shall I wait here until some one comes in? That's supine, and it might be a woman, who would faint before I could explain. Napoleonic tactics are the best. I must get there before the enemy. I'll go quietly down-stairs, try the front door, which I shall probably be able to open from the inside; if not, then there remain the basement door and the back yard. It isn't difficult to get *out* of a house. I believe there are the makings of a strategist in me, after all. (*Goes confidently out by door centre and returns hastily.*) There are voices—girls' voices—in the hall. (*Listening at door centre.*) They are coming upstairs. They ought to be in bed at this hour, anyhow. Women have no business to be so dissipated. They are coming here—to this room. I can't stay here. They'll be sure to have hysterics, and ring the burglar-alarm before I can say a word. What am I going to do? (*Looks under bed.*) Too low. (*Looks out of window.*) Too high. Ah, here! (*Opens wardrobe door, enters it, and continues speaking from the inside.*) I'll wait until an opportune moment, and then—be guided by circumstances.

A SURPRISE PARTY

Enter DODO *and* POLLY

POLLY

I *am* going to bed in a moment. Are you sure that you won't be lonesome here?

DODO, *shutting the window*

No such luck, with the maids at one end of the hall and Symonds at the other.

GEORGE, *aside, from wardrobe*

My worst fears are realized!

POLLY

And you're not afraid of burglars? I've always thought that we had provided an easy and pleasant entrance for them by putting those French windows so close to the roof.

GEORGE, *aside*

That voice sounds strangely familiar. I wish I could get a glimpse of its proprietor.

DODO

Little goose! Fancy a girl who isn't afraid of a six-legged cockroach being frightened at a mere biped! Why, a burglar is only a man, after all.

FAIR AND
TO DIVIDE HONORS
IMPARTIALLY"

GEORGE, *aside*

Better and better; this is growing interesting.

POLLY

Explain, for that sounds contradictory.

DODO

I should first beg him to be seated, and then I should begin by asking him a few questions very quietly and coolly.

POLLY

Ah! I see. The Socratic method. Do you think he would understand it?

DODO

Certainly; many burglars, and generally the most desperate characters, are college graduates.

POLLY

Which proves the advantage of possessing a university education in any walk of life. Why don't they mention that fact in the college reports?

DODO

Don't be frivolous; leave that to your elders. Then I should proceed to practical considerations, and demonstrate

to the burglar that as most of the wedding presents are stored at Tiffany's, and as we never keep ready money in the house, it would be a waste of time and effort for him to pursue his investigations further.

GEORGE, *aside*

What an admirable mind that woman has!

POLLY

But if he proved deaf to the voice of reason, and began to confiscate your toilet silver?

DODO

Then I should scream.

POLLY

Then your method ends where mine begins. Why not scream first and argue afterwards? Frankly, I like my way best.

DODO

But as men are wicked only through ignorance, one ought to try moral suasion first; it's only fair to the burglar.

GEORGE, *aside*

What admirable sentiments!

DODO

Besides, a scream is the last argument of women.

POLLY

Is it? I thought tears—

DODO

The new woman doesn't cry. It makes wrinkles.

POLLY, *sadly*

All these things are so difficult to live up to I almost wish that I were an old woman.

DODO

You'll be one fast enough if you sit up all night gossiping. It will be light in less than two hours.

POLLY

But, Dodo, I'm improving my mind. Your conversation is *so* instructive.

DODO

Sycophant, away! To bed, to bed, and don't dare to dream of your insignificant adventure.

POLLY, *rising*

No; I'll only dream of my knight-errant. Good night, lion-heart. May Heaven be kind and *not* send you an erudite burglar on whom to try your dialectics.

DODO, *kissing* POLLY

Good night, saucebox. Do you know I think the nicest thing Albert has ever given me is his little sister.

POLLY, *going*

Not *his*—yours, Dodo. Good night.

(*Exit*)

DODO *sits before toilet-table and takes the flowers out of her hair*

She's a dear. The only in-law relative that I have. What a lucky woman I am! Young and—not hideous, fairly rich, and so happy! I'm afraid something is going to happen. It isn't normal to have as good a time as I have. (*Unfastens her necklace.*) If I had collar-bones like that Anderson girl's, I'd wear a yoke.

GEORGE, *aside*

I'll make my appearance before the despoiling process goes any further. (*Opens wardrobe door a little wider, and shuts it as* DODO *screams.*)

DODO, *with a start and stifled shriek*

What's that! (*Shivers, rises and opens centre door.*) I thought I heard something move. I'm absurdly nervous. I'll call Polly. (*Shuts the door.*) No, I won't be such a coward. And how she would tease me! (*Returns to toilet-table, sits before it.*) Talking about burglars has made me feel creepy. (*Begins to take down her hair, and puts a hairpin in her mouth.*) I have a strange, cold feeling in my back, as though there were some one behind me. How silly I am! Not a mouse could hide here. The bed's too low; there's only the wardrobe to explore, and of course there's nobody in that. (*Takes off her rings.*) It's a mere form, but I'd better look in it. It's weak of me, but it will be comforting to be quite sure. (*Rises, puts her hand on wardrobe door.*) Why, I'm in a panic! I don't dare to open it. How absurd! I'll try my old formula. (*Loudly.*) Come out, you burglar! Don't linger; you're discovered!

GEORGE, *opening the wardrobe door*

I cannot disobey so imperative a command. (DODO *slowly sinks to her knees and gasps.*) Pray don't be frightened. I am not what I seem. Listen to me just a moment. (DODO *sways and is about to fall.* GEORGE *props her up against the arm-chair and looks around.*) What shall I do? What do they give women when they faint? Brandy. There isn't any. I remember—cologne or salts. (*Goes to toilet-table, takes up smelling-bottle, sees revolver.*) I'll hide this before she rouses the servants. (*Puts smelling-bottle in his pocket, returns to* DODO, *and presses the revolver to her nose.*) This will revive you.

DODO, *moaning*

Oh, don't disfigure me! Spare everything I have, and take my life—no, I don't mean that. (*Sinks on* GEORGE's *shoulder.*)

GEORGE, *aside*

What an ass I am! (*Throws down the revolver and takes out the salts.*) There, there, my dear lady, reassure yourself. I am not the burglar you take me for.

DODO, *opening her eyes*

No; you're one of the Harvard graduates—the most desperate kind.

GEORGE

I plead guilty to that charge, but—

DODO, *faintly trying to rise*

Where's my voice? I can't scream.

GEORGE, *assisting her*

Deeply as I sympathize with you, I cannot regret it. You mustn't scream yet; you haven't argued with me, or asked me any questions. Screaming first is Miss Polly's method, not yours.

DODO, *straightening herself up with feeble indignation*

I thought you were only a burglar; it seems that you are an eavesdropper.

GEORGE

I deny the first charge, and plead guilty to the second one. I dropped from the eaves of your house to the balcony, found that window open, and entered the room, hoping to leave it without alarming any one.

DODO, *starting*

You intended to chloroform us?

GEORGE

This is maddening! Look at me, please. Do I look like a criminal?

DODO

They're sometimes very gentlemanly in appearance.

GEORGE

Many thanks! Will you listen to me a moment? You will be perfectly safe. Have you a bell here which communicates with your servant's room? Yes? Where is it?

DODO

There, by the head of the bed.

GEORGE

Please put your hand on it while I tell you my story. It won't be a long one. (DODO *goes to the head of the bed and puts her finger on the electric bell.*) Now you're not afraid?

DODO

No, not much. (*Aside.*) He's rather nice.

GEORGE

Good. I want to explain my intrusion on your privacy. I was supping, after the Arion ball, in the rooms of a man who lives in the apartment-house a few doors from here.

DODO

I know—the Pandemonium.

GEORGE

Yes; a nice, quiet house. The rooms grew very hot, and to cool our heads we went up on the roof. It occurred to the other men that it would be amusing to rush down and lock the trap-door, leaving me out in the cold. This pleasantry was accordingly perpetrated, and in twenty minutes I was so chilled that I grew desperate, jumped on your roof, noticed the balcony running along the front of the house, saw that there was a window open on it, and swung myself down by it into this room. I thought it would be an easy matter to

apologize and to leave the house, and that I was a lucky man to have escaped pneumonia. Now I realize that I should have remained on the roof.

DODO, *coming towards him*

Why?

GEORGE

Because I have unfortunately frightened and annoyed you, and I cannot forgive myself for my thoughtlessness.

DODO

But I can. It wasn't your fault. It was I who was silly. It may be irrational of me, but I believe your story implicitly. You must be chilled through. (*Goes to toilet-table and takes up flask.*)

GEORGE

It's empty.

DODO

Ah!

GEORGE

I didn't empty it, though—worse luck!

DODO, *noticing the revolver on the floor*

Oh, that's dangerous!

GEORGE, *picking it up and replacing it on the toilet-table*

That's empty, too. I *did* empty *that*.

DODO, *suspiciously*

Why?

GEORGE

Because I thought it prudent to do so.

DODO

And why did you hide when we came in?

GEORGE

I was afraid of alarming you, and did it impulsively, without thinking. I intended to introduce myself at an opportune moment.

DODO

Concealment is always a mistake. Are you still cold?

GEORGE

Rather; but don't mind about me.

DODO

You'll be ill if you don't have something hot.

GEORGE

No, I won't. Never mind about that. The kindest thing you can do is to get me out of the house as soon as possible.

DODO

But you have no overcoat, and—

GEORGE

My dear lady, can't you understand that I ought to go immediately; that at any moment your maids or your butler may wake, and misconstrue the motive of my presence here?

DODO

Reassure yourself. I will explain that you are not a burglar.

GEORGE, *aside*

She is very disconcerting. I feel like a prude, and the sensation is as unpleasant as it is novel. (*Aloud.*) Please believe that I appreciate your kindness, but you must know that for me to be found with you here, at this hour, alone, would be very compromising.

DODO

Why, of course it would! I never thought of that. You must go at once, and quietly. Take off your shoes.

GEORGE

Is that necessary?

DODO

Yes; the stairs creak.

GEORGE

Anything to oblige a lady. (*Sits in arm-chair, right centre, and removes his shoes.*)

DODO

How unselfish and considerate it was of you to think of the proprieties when you were so chilled and uncomfortable! Wait a moment. (GEORGE *rises, shoes in hand.*) I'll reconnoitre before we retreat.

(*Exit by centre door*)

GEORGE

What a dear little woman! Taking my shoes off has made me feel uncommonly mean, though. I wish that I were out of this.

DODO, *reëntering*

There is some one on the stairs coming up. Who can it be?

GEORGE

The devil!—I beg your pardon.

DODO

No; it isn't. It's a man. It's probably Symonds, our butler. (*Listening.*) He's coming here.

...AS FUN

GEORGE

What does he want?

DODO

How do I know?

GEORGE

He mustn't find me here. Servants have such evil minds. I'll go out on the balcony.

DODO

No; you shall not. You'll die of cold there. (*Knock at the door.*) Step into the wardrobe. (GEORGE *resists.*) Ah, do, to oblige me. It will only be for a moment. (*A second knock.*) Hurry, hurry! (*Pushes* GEORGE, *still protesting, into the wardrobe.*) Coming! (*Shuts wardrobe door.*) What is it, Symonds? (*Opens door centre and screams.*) Albert Fielding! What are you doing here?

Enter ALBERT, *in overcoat and Derby hat, stick, umbrella, and portmanteau in his hand*

ALBERT

Trying to find my wife. What does this mean? Why are you up and dressed at this hour, and in this room? What's the matter? Has anything happened? Why are you so pale? Are you ill? Say something.

DODO, *irately*

Ill? Of course I'm ill! You have frightened me to death. I thought you were a butler—a burglar, I mean. What right have you to come home so unexpectedly, after not writing to me for three days?

ALBERT

I finished my business sooner than I had expected, and took the nine-o'clock express, thinking I would surprise you—and I think I have.

DODO

You ought to know by this time that an agreeable surprise is as rare as a black swan. Why didn't you telegraph?

ALBERT

I should have done so if I had known what a torrid welcome to expect. Perhaps next time you'd like to have me send a herald on horseback to announce my arrival?

GEORGE, *aside, from the wardrobe*

Poor fellow! I pity him.

DODO, *throwing herself into the arm-chair and whimpering*

Oh! Allie, don't be cross with me! You startled me so.

ALBERT, *putting off his overcoat and patting her on the shoulder*

Poor little girl! Did I frighten her, and did I make her cross?

DODO

No; but it isn't considerate to creep into a house in the small hours and suddenly appear.

ALBERT *bends over her. She turns her head away*

I acknowledge my transgression, and you will keep my sin ever before me. But apparently my arrival is not inopportune; I find you up and in full dress. (*Suspiciously.*) What are you doing here at this hour? Tell me!

DODO, *aside*

Now for it! How can I introduce them? I can't now; I must temporize. (*Aloud.*) I got home late from a dance, and as I couldn't sleep I have been sitting here—reading.

ALBERT

Reading? What? It must have been a very naughty book, as you have hidden it.

DODO

Did I say reading? I meant thinking.

ALBERT

I wouldn't do it any more. It spoils your complexion.

DODO, *aside*

What does he mean? Why do I feel so guilty? and how can I produce that man while Allie is in one of his suspicious moods?

ALBERT

Why are you in Harry's room?

DODO

Because mine is to be cleaned early to-morrow—no, this morning; and I wanted to sleep late, undisturbed. I'm dreadfully tired. Is the cross-examination over?

ALBERT, *aside*

All this seems very strange. (*Aloud.*) What's the matter with you? (*Taking* DODO's *hand.*) You're trembling.

DODO

With cold, dear; only with cold.

ALBERT, *turning toward wardrobe*

Let me get you a wrap.

DODO

No, no; I don't want anything. It's only a nervous chill. (*Putting herself in front of the wardrobe.*) I can't wear Harry's things; they would crush my gown; it's a new one. Admire it, please.

ALBERT

Well, I like the lining and the sleeves; but you will take cold. (*Sees Pierrot costume on bed and brings it to* DODO.) Put this on. (*Examining it.*) Was your dance a domino party?

GEORGE, *aside, opening the wardrobe door*

Shall I come out and claim my property? (DODO *waves him back in terror.*) She is badly frightened, and I feel—well, as a man does who is hiding in a wardrobe with his shoes off. There have been moments in my life when I have been easier in my mind.

DODO, *aside*

What shall I say? (*Aloud.*) How curious you are to-night! That belongs to Harry; he had it made for a Shrove Tuesday frolic. (*Aside.*) What will that man in the wardrobe think of me? I can't keep account of the fibs I have told in the last five minutes; and how am I going to present him to Allie? (*Aloud.*) No; I won't put it on. I'm warm now, and it smells of tobacco.

ALBERT

Just as you please. (*Throws the costume on the bed again; a card and handkerchief drop from the pocket as he does so. He picks them up and reads card.*) "George Carrington." (*Examines handkerchief.*) "G. C." Curious things to find in Harry's pockets, are they not? (*Looks hard at her.*)

DODO

Oh, I don't know; one is always collecting other people's cards and handkerchiefs, especially at a carnival party. (*Aside.*) What is the next trial that Heaven reserves for me? If I could only get him out of the room!

ALBERT

What have you been doing while I have been away?

DODO

Longing for you to come back, most of the time. Allie, don't you want to ask the other questions down-stairs? You must be hungry and tired.

ALBERT

No; I am not. I slept and ate on the train. I would rather sit here with you than do anything else. (*Sits in arm-chair.*) Come here, Dodo. Do you realize that it is eight weeks since I have seen you?

DODO, *with a glance of agony towards the wardrobe*

No, no; I'm too heavy and you are too tired. Besides, it's absurd for old people to be sentimental. I'm very well here. (*Takes a chair opposite him.*) What shall we talk about?

ALBERT

Just what you like. It doesn't matter much what you *say.* The main point is that you are here, that I am with you, that the two long months are over. (*Leans forward and takes both her hands.*)

DODO, *visibly embarrassed*

It's very sweet of you to care so much. Now, stop cooing, and tell me all the great and good things you have done in these two months.

ALBERT

My affairs don't interest me at present. What have *you* to tell *me?* I have a presentiment that you have something important to break to me. Have you been getting into trouble, flirting too much? Courage! Confess. You know I'm not jealous.

DODO

I haven't; indeed, I haven't. I can't understand what should make you think so. I wish you'd come down-stairs. It's so much cozier there.

ALBERT

How anxious you seem to decoy me out of this room! (*Aside.*) There's some mystery here. (*Aloud.*) No, I prefer to stay here. Down-stairs we should wake Polly, and in half an hour the carpet-cleaner will arrive.

DODO

That is true; morning is almost here. (*Aside.*) What shall I do? Fool not to have told him at once! Now the opportune moment, if there ever was one, is gone forever.

GEORGE, *putting his head out of the wardrobe*

Does she contemplate passing *me* off as the carpet-man? I feel meek and lowly enough in spirit to be one, but my make-up won't suit the rôle. (DODO *motions him back.*) My cue hasn't come yet, evidently. (*Disappears.*)

ALBERT

Do you realize that we are rarely together, Dodo? I am so absorbed in my business, and you are so seldom at home, that we don't have much of each other's society. I have been feeling a little left out of your life lately. Everybody tells me that I have a charming wife, but she's hardly mine at all, and I'm afraid I resent your friends' and admirers' monopoly of you.

DODO, *aside*

This is opportune! It's only to me that such things happen. It's growing harder and harder every moment. (*Aloud.*) You dear boy! You have been coming to a conclusion that I reached long ago. I am not clever enough to take part in your life; but why shouldn't you share my pleasures and occupations?

ALBERT

Why not, indeed, if they would really please or occupy me? Let me see; what are you going to do to-morrow?

DODO

Nothing to speak of. (*Taking tablets out of bag on table.*) At nine o'clock, manicure; at half after nine to ten. sewing-class to provide—

ALBERT

Buttons for the husband of the new woman?

DODO

No; the new man uses studs—garments for the destitute.

ALBERT

Oh, I remember that society, and the old man who refused to wear the aforesaid garments, saying that he might be poor, but, thank God! he wasn't deformed.

DODO

But, Allie, we don't sew them ourselves any longer; we pay poor women to make them.

ALBERT

And do you also pay poor men to wear them?

DODO

You're impossible! From ten to eleven o'clock, lecture on the Great Universal Seven-skinned Mother-father, by the Swami Humbugander, at Mrs. Hawtrey's; eleven to twelve, skirt-dancing lessons here; twelve to two, cooking-school and luncheon.

ALBERT

I hope that you are allowing plenty of time for the digestion of the cooking-school luncheon.

DODO

We don't eat the things we cook; we give them to the poor.

ALBERT

Well, if you do, the poor ye will not have always with you. I never knew what the League for the Abolition of Poverty meant before.

DODO, *reading*

Two to four, try on hats at Louise's; four to four and a half, lesson on the great principles of the American Constitution and the method of their application to ward politics, at the Woman's League for the Diffusion of the Knowledge of Existing Methods of Political Procedure.

ALBERT

Only half an hour for that? Then you must omit naming the association at your meeting.

DODO

Don't be critical; it doesn't suit your type. (*Consulting tablets.*) Then, from four and a half to seven there are visits and teas, dinner, and the opera.

GEORGE, *aside, opening wardrobe door*

Is she going to keep us both here while she reads that diary through? Why didn't she choose a shorter one—Pepys's, for instance? (*Disappears.*)

DODO

Now, don't you think that if you left business and amused yourself with me for a few days it would refresh you?

THROUGH
WARDROBE
DOOR

GEORGE, *aside, opening wardrobe door*

That sounds promising, and exceeds my fondest hopes. (*Disappears.*)

DODO

But you might go with me to Louise's.

ALBERT

No, my dear; that would mean financial ruin. You would look so charming in every hat you tried on that I should have to buy them all.

DODO

You desert me, as usual. I shall no longer call you Allie, but Alibi.

ALBERT

Ah, how clever you are! I already perceive the effect of the study of ward politics.

DODO

Well! if husbands will give their whole time and strength to piling up money, wives must—

ALBERT

Invent new ways to spend it, of course. Come, dear girl, don't let us quarrel. If I can't find time to study skirt-danc-

ing with you, or learn the principles of ward politics as applied to the American Constitution, I give you these opportunities to become learned and agile. Somebody has to pay for the lessons. As husbands go, I am not a bad specimen—at least, you can't accuse me of jealousy. By the way, how are they?

DODO

Whom do you mean by they?

ALBERT

Why, the Pretorian Guard, the devotees, the victims, the Sacred Legion of your adorers. No quarrels among them? No questions of precedence?

GEORGE, *aside, opening wardrobe door*

Saint Venus! She's a flirt. We're lost!

DODO

Not yet. They, like the citizens of this glorious Republic, enjoy equal rights and no privileges.

ALBERT

You are quite sure that there is no sign of an approaching dictatorship?

DODO

Quite.

ALBERT

Dear, if you ever let one of those fellows get ahead of the others—

DODO

There will be a revolution and an absolute monarch. An Emperor Alibius. Ah! dear, you tempt me to be imprudent. But a despot has to stay at home to tyrannize. He can't be always running to El Dorado gold-grabbing.

ALBERT

Apropos of gold-grabbing, I have a glorious scheme on hand, known only to three other men and myself. Sit down, dear, and let me tell you about it. Remember it is a secret, and if any of those fellows on the Street should get hold of it— (*Movement in the wardrobe.*)

GEORGE, *aside, from wardrobe*

The psychological moment has arrived!

DODO

Hush! Don't speak so loud.

ALBERT

Why? Who can hear us in this room, at this hour? Why do you stop me?

DODO, *flurried*

Since the invention of the X-rays I never feel really alone. Don't tell me your secrets, dear. Indeed, I don't think I can understand them.

ALBERT

Oh, yes; you can understand this one perfectly—a drivelling idiot could. You've heard of the pearls they've been finding in Arizona—

DODO, *throwing her arms about his neck and kissing him*

And you have brought me some! You darling!

ALBERT

Hm!—no, I haven't. I got that kiss under false pretences. You'll have to take it back again. You see, in surveying on the shore of the lakes where they were found—

GEORGE *opens wardrobe door.* DODO *motions him back*

Hang it! If I weren't afraid of getting her into trouble—
(*Disappears.*)

DODO, *rising and putting her hand over* ALBERT'S *lips*

Never mind, dear, I don't want you to tell me. Without meaning to, I should be sure to let it out. I talk in my sleep sometimes.

ALBERT

But you seldom go to church, so there's no danger.

DODO

No; but I attend lectures.

ALBERT

Where the Swami does all the talking.

DODO

That's the reason I always go to sleep. Don't, dear, tell me anything more.

ALBERT

You seem uneasy, not to say frightened.

DODO

I? Why, what an idea! I am only too tired and too stupid to understand anything to-night. I danced every dance, you know, and I am dying of sheer fatigue.

ALBERT

That's my usual *congé*. I know the formula. Shall I unlace your gown?

ALBERT

I think—I am almost sure—that there is something there which ought to come out now.

DODO, *putting her hand on his arm*

Allie, if you open that door, I shall faint. There are rats in that closet. For Heaven's sake, don't let them out! Do you want to kill me?

ALBERT, *throwing her off and seizing a foil from the wall*

No; but I am going to kill the rat.

DODO *screams.* ALBERT *tries to open the wardrobe door, which is thrown back in his face*

Enter GEORGE, *shod in red bath-slippers, the lid of a hat-box on one arm, and a cane in his right hand*

GEORGE, *placing himself in an attitude of defense and using the hat-box cover as a shield*

I have an apology to make to you, sir.

ALBERT, *fiercely*

Any apology will be insufficient, sir.

GEORGE, *still in a fighting attitude*

I insist upon giving you an explanation of my presence here, and in justice to this lady—

ALBERT

We will leave her out of the conversation, if you please. As for your explanation, I think that I am already familiar with it. Explanations given under certain circumstances have a strong family likeness. It is what follows the explanation that interests me.

GEORGE

If you are going to take it in that way, I am at your service. But you *shall* hear me first.

ALBERT

What is the use of wasting time. I know your story—it's the usual one. I'll tell it to *you*, if you insist upon it.

GEORGE

Do so, then; but remember that my patience is not inexhaustible, and that if some one beside myself were not implicated—

ALBERT

I'll try, then. (GEORGE *and* ALBERT *lower their weapons.*) You dined too well, of course.

GEORGE

Pardon me, I supped with a bachelor friend.

ALBERT

This is an unimportant detail. To continue: a trifle exhilarated, you mistook my house for yours, and by a strange coincidence, which is also an every-day occurrence, your latch-key fitted my house-door, and you came up to this room, under the impression that it was yours.

GEORGE

I don't see the use of all this. Either you believe me, or you don't. What do you propose to do about it?

ALBERT

Don't interrupt; we'll come to that soon enough.

GEORGE

But I will interrupt. You've had the floor the whole evening, while I have been stifling in that stuffy wardrobe, hoping you'd tire of talking and go, and now you want to impose your conventional version of my adventures on me. It won't do; mine is the romantic, rather than the classical explanation. I *was* exhilarated, but I entered your house by the window on that balcony to avoid freezing on my friend's roof. (*Aside.*) Sounds unlikely; can't blame him if he doesn't believe it.

ALBERT

And you found—

GEORGE

The room empty. Before I had time to leave it—

ALBERT

A lady entered.

GEORGE

Wrong again. Two ladies.

ALBERT

I see you go me one better every time. What did you do then?

GEORGE

I was in a panic myself, for fear of frightening them.

ALBERT

And, out of chivalrous consideration, you concealed yourself in the wardrobe.

GEORGE

Yes.

ALBERT

Where you hoped to remain hidden until an opportune moment for—

GEORGE

Exactly.

DODO

Why, this is wonderful. I never knew before that you were a mind-reader.

GEORGE

A remarkable case of telepathy! Seer as you are, I wish you could realize that though this house, this cane, and possibly these slippers are yours, this story is mine, and I protest—

ALBERT

Let us get on with it, then, for God's sake! While you were sneak—hidden one of the ladies left the room.

DODO

Allie, why have you concealed this wonderful gift from me all these years? You would make a fortune with it.

ALBERT

Oh, I am the luckiest of men!

GEORGE

And I am the most unfortunate.

ALBERT

And while you were giving Mrs. Fielding an elaborate account of your adventures—

GEORGE

Your footsteps were heard, you knocked at the door, and, fearing that you were of a jealous and suspicious nature, I very weakly consented to hide myself again, to spare this lady an unpleasant scene. To my profound regret, I have been unable to do so, and I offer her my humble excuses for the trouble and anxiety I have given her.

ALBERT

A very ingenious story! In my place, would you believe it?

GEORGE

In your place, I should believe *her*.

ALBERT

This is a sceptical age!

DODO

Allie, I assure you it's quite true.

GEORGE

On my honor as a gentleman, it is true, and I am prepared to maintain its truth at any cost.

DODO, *shaking hands with* GEORGE

You're a fine fellow, even if you have made a lot of trouble in this family.

ALBERT, *hesitating*

Suppose you present me to your chivalrous friend.

DODO

I don't know his name.

GEORGE, *going to bed, dropping cane and hat-box cover, and picking up Pierrot costume, from the pocket of which he takes out a card*

Permit me. (*Hands card to* ALBERT.) It's so awkward introducing one's self, you know.

ALBERT

Not so awkward as some other things. (*Reads.*) "George Carrington." I've seen that name before. (*Aside.*) What an unholy mess this is. And what am I to believe? And what ought I to do? He seems a gentleman, and I *can't* think that my Dodo—and yet, that ridiculous story is too improbable.

POLLY, *knocking on door centre and calling outside*

Dodo, Dodo, wake up! Let me in. I am so frightened! I am going to faint. Quick, quick, open the door!

DODO

Heavens! What is the matter now? Here's Polly frightened to death, and I must let her in, and she ought not to find you here. She's had a nightmare, I suppose. I told her not to eat that Newburg. Oh, please hide yourselves—do; she may be in her—

POLLY, *outside*

Dodo, Dodo, let me in before we're murdered! Hurry! Hurry!

DODO

Hide—hide yourselves. I can't have her find you here. I won't be humiliated before Polly.

ALBERT

And I won't hide in that confounded wardrobe to please anybody.

GEORGE

Nor will I. That piece of furniture has made trouble enough in this domestic circle already.

DODO

Then I must. I haven't the courage to go through another scene. (ALBERT *detains her.*)

GEORGE

What a nuisance I am! I am willing to do anything to atone for my thoughtlessness.

ALBERT

Sh! Sh! (*Sternly.*) Dodo, open that door. (DODO *obeys.*)

Enter POLLY *in a dressing-gown, with her hair loose*

POLLY, *clutching* DODO

Dodo, the maids say that there are burglars walking on the roof and trying the trap-door. They heard them distinctly, and came to tell me. We'll be murdered, and my birthday presents stolen. If brother Albert were only here, or that—(*Sees* ALBERT *and* GEORGE, *starts and gasps.*) Albert—why—how? Mr. Carrington—how came you here?

ALBERT

That's what we've all been asking him.

GEORGE

It will hardly be worth your while to listen to my excuses; they did not satisfy your brother.

POLLY, *warmly*

I am sure that Mr. Carrington is incapable of doing anything that requires an apology, though he may be courteous and modest enough to offer one where none is demanded.

ALBERT

Softly, softly, Polly! It seems you know this gentleman, and have the advantage of Mrs. Fielding, to whom I found him making an unseasonable and—unexpected visit.

POLLY

Then I am to blame, for I asked him to come.

ALBERT

Are you awake? Do you know what you are saying? This visit was intended for you?

POLLY

Yes; I asked him to call to-night.

ALBERT

Polly!

POLLY

I asked him to call to-night—no, to-night I asked him to call.

ALBERT

When and where did you make his acquaintance?

POLLY

This evening, in the street. But why are we chatting here, when the burglars are perhaps entering the house, and we may be sent to our Maker inside of five minutes?

ALBERT

She's right. Mr. Carrington, load that revolver, and stand by the window, please. Polly, turn down the gas. (POLLY *does so.*) I'll watch the trap-door. They can't enter from the roof in any other way. (*Takes up foil and opens the door centre.* GEORGE *loads revolver, and* POLLY *sinks into the arm-chair.*)

DODO, *running to* ALBERT *and putting her hand on his arm*

Come away; you'll be shot!

ALBERT, *coldly, removing her hand ceremoniously*

Don't be alarmed. I think the servants have been dreaming. None but honest folk would make noise enough to wake them. I'm more interested in something else at present. (DODO, *repulsed, looks haughtily at him and returns to left centre.*) Now, Polly, you are perfectly safe. Stay where you are, and answer my questions. You met Mr. Carrington this evening?

POLLY, *rising and going to centre*

Yes.

GEORGE

And I was afraid that I was never going to find you again.

POLLY

So was I, and I was racking my brains to think of some way of letting you know my address. It was stupid of me to forget when I asked you to come and let my sister thank you for your assistance. (*Mischievously.*) Frankly, I contemplated a "personal," and composed one before I went to sleep.

DODO, *aside*

Little fox!

GEORGE, *aside*

Angel!

ALBERT, *aside*

Guileless, innocent dove! How little does the best business man understand women—least of all, the women of his own family!

GEORGE

A "personal"? Let me hear it.

POLLY

I'm not a born writer, and I haven't studied the "personal" style, but of course I knew that it should be terse, shouldn't it?

ALBERT

At thirty cents a word, one is perforce laconic.

GEORGE, *rapturously*

Do try to recall it!

POLLY

It was rather neat for a beginner. Let me see. (*Reciting mechanically.*) If the hand—young gentleman who extricated a lady from a damaged cab last evening, at Fifty-sixth Street and Fifth Avenue, will call at Twenty East Thirty-sixth Street he will be warmly welcomed.

GEORGE

I have been so beyond my fondest anticipations. (*To* POLLY.) How sweet of you to be so grateful for a slight service, which gave me such pleasure to render you! And you were really going to send this notice?

POLLY

No; on reflection, I decided not to do so.

ALBERT, *with a sigh of relief*

Ah!

GEORGE

Why?

POLLY

Because I remembered that "personals" were rarely written by nice people, and I didn't want to frighten you away.

ALBERT

You misjudged him, my dear; he is a man of iron nerve.

GEORGE

I should never be courageous enough to decline such an invitation.

POLLY

But, tell me, how did you find out where we lived? And why did you come at such a strange hour?

ALBERT

That is a family query, Polly. Your friend has already answered it. Now, suppose you stop looking at him a moment, and answer a few questions in your turn. Where did you meet Mr. Carrington?

POLLY

Don't be severe, Allie. You can't be too nice to Mr. Carrington. He has put us all under obligations to him.

ALBERT, *ironically*

He has.

POLLY

You see, Albert, I went first to a "Rosebud" dinner, and was going with my maid in a cab to meet Dodo at the dance, when, at the corner of Fifty-sixth Street, we crashed into a hansom, and something—I think it was a wheel—fell off, and so did our cabman. Parkins and I climbed out, while he and the hansom man were discussing the accident. Just as we collided, a man—Mr. Carrington—jumped from the hansom, ran up to us to know if we were hurt, and insisted on our taking his cab, which was uninjured. He followed us on foot to the Maplesons', and when he helped us out at their door I asked him to call on you (*turning to* DODO) and let you thank him, and he gave me his card. But somehow, though we chatted until Parkins reminded me that it was growing late, I forgot to tell him our address. Parkins said afterwards that it didn't matter, as she was sure that we would know each other again by sight, which was silly of her, because what good would that do?

ALBERT

And that is all?

POLLY

That's what Dodo said when I told her. (*Glancing at window.*) Ah, there they are! I had forgotten about them. Save us! Save us! (*Rushes into* GEORGE'S *arms.* DODO *clings to* ALBERT'S *arm.*)

Two figures appear outside the window

GEORGE, *pushing* DODO *and* POLLY *into the wardrobe, returning to window, and pointing revolver at figures outside*

Stand and deliver!—no, I oughtn't to say that. Clear out, or I'll fire! Scatter, before I count three. One— (*Discovers that the supposed house-breakers are* JOE MITCHELL *and* TOM CAREY.) What are you doing here, boys? Wasn't it enough to have got me into an infernal mess with your primitive ideas of humor, but you must frighten other people to death as well? Be off, or I'll fire! The joke's on you this time.

ALBERT, *joining* GEORGE *at window and throwing down his foil*

These gentlemen are friends of yours?

GEORGE *nods*

It is not the first time this evening that I have regretted the fact that they are.

ALBERT

Pray invite them in. I am growing accustomed to this sort of thing. We seem to be having a morning reception. Perhaps they, too, have had a special invitation from some member of the family. (*Opens the window.*) Pray come in, gentlemen. I suppose you are giving me a surprise party to celebrate my unexpected return home. You're welcome. Pray make yourselves thoroughly comfortable.

Enter TOM *and* JOE

TOM *and* JOE, *together*

We owe you an apology, sir; but no doubt Mr. Carrington has already explained everything.

ALBERT

No; we have been too busy since his arrival. Perhaps you will be good enough—

JOE

Why, you don't mean to say that you and old George have been hobnobbing here for over an hour, and he hasn't told you the good one we got in on him? What *have* you been talking about?

TOM, *taking off his cap*

You are a cool hand. You find a strange man meandering over your ranch, and don't find out how he got in. The Klondike isn't in it with you. And then they say that taking fliers on the Street breaks up a man's nerves.

ALBERT

You have the advantage of me.

TOM

I think not. I'm your friend Carey's younger brother.

ALBERT

The deuce you are! Now what are you here for? (*Aside.*) No wonder I didn't remember the cub; it's grown.

TOM, *mischievously*

Well, as Mr. Carrington here is too much of a man of the world to feel embarrassed or to offer an explanation under any circumstances, I suppose that a simple person like myself must do it for him. Superior people are apt to need some one to go about with them to enable them to remain superior.

GEORGE

Never mind commentary. Give us the text.

TOM

We were having a little supper, after the Arion ball, in Joe's rooms at the Pandemonium, when George said something, in his high and mighty way, about a man of the world never being at a loss in any situation. We naturally disagreed with him. Later, when the rooms grew stuffy, we went up on the roof to cool our heads, and George, who had been rather pensive and abstemious all the evening, wandered off unsociably by himself.

JOE

You see, he had just had an adventure.

ALBERT

At the Arion ball? (*Looks apprehensively at the wardrobe.*)

GEORGE

I say, can't you let that alone?

JOE

No; *before* the ball. It spoiled his evening. A lovely unknown had her cab smashed, and George gave her his, dogged her to her party, and then joined us, hard hit and very much down in the mouth.

GEORGE

Hush, Joe! You know I refused to discuss the lady.

JOE

Yes; that was the ominous feature of the case.

TOM

When you have finished adding these irrelevant details, I'll go on with my story.

JOE

We're only supplying the human interest to your bald narrative.

TOM

To continue—for I shall finish my tale if I have to hold you both down.

ALBERT

Please go on. I am serious enough, in all conscience.

TOM

We thought it would be fun to leave the man of the world, who could so easily master any situation, out on the roof, to see how he would get down to *terra firma.* So we piled in suddenly, locked the trap-door, and left George alone with the night and his worldly wisdom. Then we began to play poker and got interested, and it was half an hour before we went up to look for him, to see what kind of a ladder he had made of his *savoir faire.* Naturally, we didn't find him, and, after we had looked behind every chimney and tried every door, we noticed this convenient balcony, jumped down on it, and—here we are.

ALBERT

And you are very welcome. (*Goes to* GEORGE *and offers him his hand.*) Mr. Carrington, I owe you an apology.

GEORGE

Don't mention it. I know how absurd my story seemed. It sounded incredible to me while I was telling it. I could

never forgive myself for entering your house by the window if I did not hope to prove myself worthy of reëntering it by the door.

ALBERT

And now, as talking is thirsty work, and we've all done our share of it, come down-stairs and have something.

ALL

We will.

JOE, *aside to* TOM

He seemed a trifle stiff at first, but he's the right sort, isn't he?

TOM

Sure.

DODO, *emerging from the wardrobe with dignity*

Mr. Fielding, present your new friends to me.

ALBERT, *aside*

It's her turn now. Expiation looms before me. (*Aloud.*) Mrs. Fielding, may I present Mr. Carey and Mr. Mitchell?

DODO

Charmed, I'm sure. There's nothing so nice as an impromptu party. You were on your way to the dining-room. I'll go with you, and make you a rarebit. I make them rather well.

ALBERT, *aside*

How sweetly she's taking it. (*Aloud.*) There isn't anything indigestible that my wife cannot and does not make.

DODO

And dishes that can be eaten with perfect impunity at the club are so apt to disagree with husbands when partaken of in the sanctity of home.

ALBERT, *aside*

I am not so sure, after all, that she has forgiven me.

DODO

Dear Mr. Carrington, may I borrow your costume?

GEORGE

It, like its owner, is entirely at your service.

DODO

Always the knight-errant. (*Takes Pierrot costume and hands it through wardrobe door to* POLLY.)

LBERT, *aside to* DODO

Now we'll get out of the way and give Sis a chance.

GEORGE

Can't I see Miss Fielding for a moment?

DODO

What do you think I borrowed your costume for?

ALBERT

Dodo, will you ever forgive me?

DODO

Ever is a long time, and I pity you too much not to forgive you now.

ALBERT

Darling!

DODO

Do not misunderstand me. I forgive you because all tender feeling for you is dead—annihilated by the baseness of your conduct this evening.

Enter POLLY *in the Pierrot costume, from the wardrobe*

POLLY

Please, may I come to the party too? Mr. Carrington, present your old friends to me. We all talk alike in this family, don't we?

GEORGE *presents* TOM *and* JOE *to her*

ALBERT

You must not say such things to me, even in jest.

DODO

Jesting is out of the question. I am too outraged by your insulting suspicions to be able to realize anything but the indignities you have heaped upon me.

ALBERT

But, Dodo, I had every excuse for my suspicions. Appearances were against you. Could I distrust the evidence of my senses?

DODO

The man who trusts the evidence of his senses rather than his wife's word, is unworthy the name of—of—

ALBERT

Of what?

DODO

Of husband, even. O Allie, how could you think so meanly of me? And how unreasonable of you to balance appearances, a little circumstantial evidence, against your knowledge of my character! It is too bad: you have broken my heart.

ALBERT

What can I say, except that I am sorry? Indeed, I am; and ready to eat any amount of humble pie.

POLLY

What are we waiting for?

JOE

Our hostess. I think Mr. Fielding is telling her our little joke on George.

GEORGE, *aside*

I fancy, from his expression, that he is finding out how pleasant and easy it is to offer an explanation to an incredulous auditor. (*To* POLLY.) Don't interrupt them; talk to me. (*Aside.*) He needs a little more punishment.

POLLY

No; I have done so too much already. Come and help me get supper. (*To* JOE *and* TOM.) There's a call for volunteers.

(*Exeunt*)

DODO

You can't say anything. If you could only unsay the mean, unmanly things you *have* said, it might be worth while. It is easy to forgive you, but I cannot forget that I have seen you—whom I always thought generous and brave—suspicious, petty, spiteful. If you had tried to *kill* Mr. Carrington or me, I could have understood and sympathized with you; but to

lash me with sarcasms, to stab him with sharp words—it wasn't nice, it wasn't nice. You are not the person I thought you were. You are a stranger to me.

ALBERT

Try to put yourself in my place. Think over the situation, and the inference one would naturally draw from it.

DODO

Where were your intuitions?

ALBERT

I haven't any. I'm only a poor, dull man, who has to depend on his reason as a means of arriving at the truth.

DODO

And you see how infallible it is! No, Mr. Fielding, your paltry reasons are plausible enough to convince any man, no doubt, but they cannot heal the incurable wounds those cruel words of yours have—

ALBERT

Stop, Dodo, stop! (*With emotion.*) You call me cruel. Do you know what I have suffered in this last hour? Have you no imagination, that you cannot realize how suspicion, rage, and jealousy tear the heart they enter? Think what it is to try to be calm and reasonable with a red mist before

your eyes. Try to imagine how a man feels who is stabbed by the hand he loves best, and then call me cruel if you dare!

DODO

Allie, Allie, forgive me! How dull I have been! My poor boy! No; I did not understand—I, who am so proud of my intuitions.

ALBERT

What a brute I am! I have made you cry.

DODO

No; I'm the brute. I've made you suffer. Do you really love me so much as that?

ALBERT

Oh, that isn't anything. I love you enough to eat the rarebit you're going to make for us, and quite enough to make me regret that I am "a mere stranger" to you.

DODO

No; now we are really becoming acquainted, and when you have played a little with me and I have worked with you, when you take me on some of your tiresome trips and tell me the things that worry you, then we shall become friends.

ALBERT

Very well. It's a bargain. May a new acquaintance seal it thus? (*Kisses her hand.*)

The Lesser Evil

DENIS DE BEAULIEU, a young captain.

ALAIN DE MALÉTROIT,[1] the head of the house of Malétroit.

HUGH BONTEMPS, man-at-arms in the service of the Sire de Malétroit.

FATHER DOMINIC, a priest.

BLANCHE DE MALÉTROIT, niece of Alain.

Time, 1429. Place, Château Landon, France.

1 This play, with the permission of Mrs. Stevenson, is founded on the short story entitled, "The Sire de Malétroit's Door," by Robert Louis Stevenson.

THE LESSER EVIL

Scene

The hall of a mediaeval town house. Centre, an open door studded with nails and ornamented with wrought-iron hinges. Right, a stand of arms, a shrine with tapers and flowers, and a lamp hanging before it. Right wall, a carved door, a chimneypiece with a shield of arms above it, a fire burning on the hearth, and a deeply embrasured window with leaded casements.

Left centre, a credence with silver beakers and trenchers. Left wall, a low stairway leading up to a doorway hung with arras, a bench with cushions at its back. Left centre, an arm-chair with a canopy over it, and a small table with a silver goblet on it. Right centre, a couple of wooden stools. No light but that of the fire and the shrine lamp.

As the curtain rises the sound of stamping and shouting is heard without.

ALAIN DE MALÉTROIT, *seated in the arm-chair*

Ah-h! (*Chuckles.*)

The fracas increases, swords rattle and clash, a heavy body rings on the pavement outside, the door is pushed open, and enter backwards, sword in hand, still thrusting against his as-

sailants, DENIS DE BEAULIEU. *He staggers as though the door had yielded unexpectedly behind him. As it swings open a glimpse of a moon-lighted Gothic porch and a group of struggling men-at-arms, their torches tossing to and fro, is seen outside. Then the door swings to again with a dull, clanging noise.*

DENIS

Saved—not too soon. (*Listens. Cries outside: "Come out and taste our steel again!" "Come back, cockerel!" "Curse him!" "The devil fly away with him!" Blows shake the door.*) I'm breathed! (*Leans against the door and pants.*) I'm scratched, too. (*Wipes his sword on his handkerchief and bandages a cut on his wrist with it, fastening the knot with his teeth and right hand.*) They are dragging him away! (*The beating on the door ceases.*) We've made the devil of a mess on the porch steps. (*Looks around, sheathes his sword and kneels a moment at the shrine; crosses himself. The noises outside grow fainter, and the footsteps retreat in the distance.*) Those gentlemen are in too high a humor to be long delayed. I 'll wait here; six to one is overmuch for me. (*Listens again.*) They are gone. (*Peers through the darkness.*) How dark it is! (*Fumbles at the door.*) I 'll venture out now. (*Runs his hands over the door, feels the edges of it, passes his fingers over the nails, and handles the hinges.*) What! no sign of a lock, no latch; not even a keyhole. What ails the door! (*Shakes it violently.*) I can't open it. (*Throws himself against it.*) I might as well push at a town gate! (*Whistles.*) I 'm trapped. Oh, for a light! (*Gropes his way to the shrine, lights one of the tapers by the flame of the lamp, and bends his knee before the*

Virgin's picture.) Thy pardon, Blessed Lady, my need is great. (*Returns to the door, examines it carefully, presses the wood all along the edges.*) Some secret spring! Some cunning piece of smith's work. I'm a prisoner. (*Unsheathes his sword, and, taper in hand, goes to right wall and looks at the arms over the chimneypiece.*) The Malétroit. I'm in good hands. (*Crosses stage to left and suddenly perceives* ALAIN, *who is smiling and reaching for his wine-cup.*)

ALAIN, *bowing*

You are welcome. I've been waiting for you since curfew. (*He raises his hand and the tapestry curtains at the top of the staircase are drawn back. A flood of light streams in.*)

DENIS

You are mistaken, messire. I had no intention of trespassing on your hospitality, and I beg you to pardon my unseemly intrusion. (*Replaces and extinguishes taper.*)

ALAIN, *indulgently*

'Tis of no moment. I fully expected you, and the fashion of your entrance is of no importance. Be seated. We have much business to settle together.

DENIS

I am an unwilling intruder. It was an accident which forced me into your door.

ALAIN

The door? A contrivance of my own. A neat bit of smith's work, eh? It is to it that I owe the honor of your presence here. So you were shy of my acquaintance. Well, for that you see I was prepared. Modesty is a sweet fault in a stripling, and a rare. It behooved me—my honor required that I should overcome it. Thanks to my door, I have. Believe me, though uninvited, you are not unexpected or unwelcome.

DENIS

Surely you mistake me for one more fortunate. I am not the person you expected. I am Denis, Damoiseau de Beaulieu, a stranger in this town, and I entered your house because—

ALAIN

Monsieur de Beaulieu, your explanations are ingenious, but superfluous. Permit me to retain my own ideas in regard to your presence here. Meanwhile, pray be seated.

DENIS, *shrugging his shoulders, seats himself on a stool to the right of* ALAIN. *A low murmur is heard behind the door to right.* ALAIN *sips his wine and chuckles.*

DENIS, *politely, after a pause*

You are of a merry humor, sir.

ALAIN *falls into a fit of prolonged, silent laughter*

DENIS, *rising and putting on his hat with a flourish*

Are you drunk or mad? Why do you insult me so wantonly? Do you take me for a cutpurse? You refuse to hear my explanations, you laugh in my face, and by God! I'll bear it no longer. Open that door, or I'll hew your rat-trap to pieces! (*Lays his hand on his sword hilt.*)

ALAIN

Really, all that! You're saturnine, sir, and have no love of honest mirth. Compose yourself, my nephew.

DENIS, *in a passion, snapping his fingers in* ALAIN'S *face*

Liar! I am no kinsman of yours.

ALAIN, *in a white fit of rage, his voice hoarse and shaken with fury*

Be quiet, you brawler! Do you suppose that when I set my trap I did not post my rangers within call? Stir one step, and I'll have you bound to your seat with your own sword-belt. (*Lowering and softening his voice.*) Sit quietly in your place, and we'll despatch our affairs without heat or noise. The choice is yours, sir.

DENIS, *after looking helplessly about him, shakes his head and sits down*

I am a prisoner, then? (*Aside.*) He's mad.

Enter FATHER DOMINIC *from door on right, stares at* DENIS *and whispers to* ALAIN

ALAIN

How is it with her?

DOMINIC

She has sobbed herself into submission.

ALAIN

Poor lamb! 'Tis a pity of her. A comely boy, well born, and of her own picking, too. She's over nice.

DOMINIC

It is a strange bridal, messire. Have patience with a trifle of maidenly coyness.

ALAIN

Much coyness she showed when she began the game. Now she shall play it out. (*Turning to* DENIS.) Monsieur de Beaulieu, my niece has been waiting for you. She grows impatient. Permit me to fetch her.

DENIS *bows and rises.* ALAIN *leaves the hall by door on right, and reënters, dragging, rather than leading,* BLANCHE DE MALÉTROIT.

ALAIN, *sweetly*

A little shamefaced, you see. It is such an innocent dove! Here is your friend, my dear. Wish him good evening.

SWORD IN HAND
STILL THRUSTING
AGAINST HIS

BLANCHE *still holds down her head.* ALAIN *places his hand under her chin and raises it by force. She looks at* DENIS, *stares and gasps, then, with a scream. sinks upon her knees.*

BLANCHE

It is not he! Uncle, it is not he!

ALAIN

Naturally, it isn't. Of course you never clapped eyes on him before. He's an utter stranger, isn't he? and you don't even know his name?

BLANCHE, *wringing her hands*

My uncle, I have never seen this man before. Oh, sir, help me! Tell him the truth.

DENIS, *aside*

She's mad, too. (*Aloud.*) As God lives, sir, I have never seen Mademoiselle before!

ALAIN, *shrugging his shoulders*

How unfortunate! But then these hurried marriages are not more miserable than the ceremonious variety. Come, bridegroom, I will give you two hours in which to make my niece's acquaintance. Be brisk with your wooing, for Father Dominic is waiting.

BLANCHE, *rising and seizing him by the sleeve*

This is a sorry jest. Am I not punished enough? Surely, you would not thrust me on this stranger? Pity me and him. You must believe me when I swear to you by my dead father's soul that I do not know him—that he is *not* the man.

ALAIN, *roughly disengaging his sleeve*

And what is that to me? (*Goes towards the door; before ascending the steps turns towards her.*) My business, as head of the family you have disgraced, is to find you a husband at once. I have done so. Make the most of him. On my soul, I believe that he is your own choice; if not, that's his affair and yours. Mistress, you have lost the right to question me, to pick and choose. I am too soft; instead of bundling you into a convent for the rest of your days, I have found your sneaking lover for you, and you had best thank God for a kind uncle.

(*Exeunt left door* ALAIN *and* FATHER DOMINIC)

BLANCHE, *raising her bent head and turning angrily to* DENIS

And what, sir, may be the meaning of all this?

DENIS

God knows. I am a prisoner in this house, which seems full of mad people. I know nothing, and I understand nothing of it all.

BLANCHE

And what brought you here?

DENIS

The foul fiend, I think. I came to town to-night on business of my own—a heritage—but why speak of that? I had an escort of five lances, two days' leave of absence, and a safe-conduct from my commander.

BLANCHE

A safe-conduct? Did you think that would protect you in this lawless place, filled with roystering men-at-arms? The English and the Burgundians are both here, and God alone can tell which are the harder drinkers or the fiercer brawlers.

DENIS

Of course, I knew I ran a certain risk; but a soldier takes chances.

BLANCHE

Pardon me, you seem so young.

DENIS, *grandly*

Indeed, but a young man may be an old soldier.

BLANCHE, *courtesying*

I crave a veteran's forgiveness. Will your venerability continue?

DENIS

Willingly. I put up at the Tête d'Or. After supper, when I asked the way to my late kinsman's house, mine host prayed me to remain by the fire. The town is not safe after curfew, he assured me.

BLANCHE

He was a wise man; of course you did not follow his advice?

DENIS

You are a wise woman; of course I did not. After a long search, I finally found the house, close-barred and black as a tomb. After half an hour of knocking and shouting and calling down the curses of the whole drowsy neighborhood, which apparently goes to roost with its own chickens, I gave up my quest and tried to return to the inn.

BLANCHE

And you no doubt lost your way in our winding streets.

DENIS

Pardi, I did at once. 'Tis a godless town, this—no images, no shrine lamps to guide a poor sinner on his way. I had

more than once to lament the decay of devotion in these parts. Not a glimmer of light anywhere.

BLANCHE

I won't defend our municipal regulations. Go on.

DENIS

I groped on, knowing that I must keep climbing the hill, and as I stumbled out of a tangle of black alleys into the space before your porch, I saw lights and heard voices. It was a patrol of men-at-arms, who had been making free with the wine-bowl, going the rounds.

BLANCHE

Oh, they might have killed you like a dog!

DENIS

Not quite so easily, I hope. But they were in no mood to be particular about safe-conducts. Hoping that their own torches would hide me from them, I ran into your porch, but my foot rolled on a pebble, my sword rang against the stones, and they were on me in a trice. Luckily for me, the stair is narrow, and I managed to free my sword in time to trip up the others with the bodies of the two who first attacked me. Then I set my back against your door, which yielded. I darted in, it closed behind me—and you know the rest.

BLANCHE

No; but I can guess. My uncle was waiting for you here.

DENIS

So he assured me after I had found out that the door wouldn't open again. And then he insisted that I should make your acquaintance. Perhaps you will follow my example, and tell me the answer to all these riddles.

BLANCHE

My uncle mistakes you for another man—one whom—whom he has never seen—who wrote me a letter. The trap was set for him; you have fallen into it. I would tell you all —indeed, you have a right to know; but will you not spare me the shame of it—the— (*Hides her face in her hands.*)

DENIS

I have no rights but those you give me. It seems we are companions in evil fortune. Can I not help you?

BLANCHE

Bless you for that kind word! No, there is no help for me. I am justly punished for my own folly. But oh, Monsieur de Beaulieu, do not think too badly of me. I have been foolish, imprudent, but not so very wicked. I still know the meaning of honor. I am—I was a Malétroit. You shall question me,

if you will, as it is through my fault that you are in such an evil case.

DENIS

Mademoiselle, keep your secret. You have given me your confidence; it remains for me to prove myself worthy of it. Is Messire de Malétroit within? (*Pointing to the door left.*)

BLANCHE

You would speak—argue with him? You might as well plead with yonder wall.

DENIS

Will it please you to fetch him here?

BLANCHE, *going out of door left and turning*

You'll never move him.

(*Exit* BLANCHE)

Reënter BLANCHE *and* ALAIN, *who greets* DENIS *with an ironical obeisance*

DENIS, *taking* BLANCHE'S *hand and leading her up to* ALAIN

Messire de Malétroit, in offering me the hand of your niece you have done me undeserved honor, and if her heart were free to go with it I should joy in accepting it. But I cannot profit by a misunderstanding which has placed her at my discretion. Therefore, I decline the hand of Mademoiselle.

I'LL KNEEL HERE
AS THOUGH I WERE
AT CONFESSION

gencies. You can be riddled with pikes, if you prefer it to hanging. But, Sir Impetuosity, I counsel you to wait until sunrise. You may change your mind—and my niece gains on acquaintance. Her complexion is really finer by daylight. And she evidently wants to speak with you. (*Looking at* BLANCHE, *who makes an imploring gesture to* DENIS.) I am debonair, and if you will promise to remain quietly here with Mademoiselle, I'll allow you two hours in which to decide on your fate.

DENIS

I give you my word of honor.

(*Exit* ALAIN, *bowing and smiling, followed by the men-at-arms*)

DENIS

Is this some grisly jest? Is he a madman, and am I to die like a cutpurse—I, a noble and a soldier?

BLANCHE, *running to* DENIS, *her hands extended*

It is all real. Nothing can turn my uncle from his purpose. But you shall not die; you shall marry me, after all.

DENIS, *stiffly*

I am not so afraid of death as you seem to believe, nor so anxious to snatch at life at any cost to myself or others. It is not death that I dread; it is the dishonor of the manner of it.

BLANCHE

Oh! I see you are no coward. It is for my own sake. I could not bear to have you slain for such a scruple.

DENIS, *coldly*

I fear that, in your haste to save my life, Mademoiselle, you are forgetting what you owe to a happier man.

BLANCHE *goes towards door on right with bent head; at the door she turns*

Monsieur de Beaulieu, do not spoil a noble act by base words. You strike at one who is unarmed. I cannot retort on you, but I'll go pray for you, sir.

(*Exit*)

DENIS

What a churl I am! Mademoiselle! (*Goes after her, stops and shrugs his shoulders.*)

Reënter BLANCHE

You called me?

DENIS

Yes, and then repented of so doing.

BLANCHE

Why?

DENIS

Because I wanted to ask your forgiveness, and I know how useless it is to do so.

BLANCHE, *giving him her hand*

It is already given. How could it be otherwise? Think what you are doing for me, for my misdeeds. (*Begins to cry.*)

DENIS, *going to her*

Do not punish me so severely, and pardon me if I seemed vexed at first. Death have I often affronted in fight and mêlée; but the sight of that rope—and when your uncle knows that I am a gentleman—it's really too bad!

BLANCHE

I know that you are brave and generous. What I *want* to know is whether I can serve you now—or afterwards (*with a sob*).

DENIS

Most certainly. Let me sit beside you, as though I were a friend, instead of a foolish intruder. Help me to forget how we are circumstanced.

BLANCHE, *seating herself in the state chair and motioning him to a place beside her, which he does not take*

You are gallant, sir, very gallant—and it somehow pains me. In such a sad plight as ours all ceremony should be

waived. Ah, Monsieur de Beaulieu! (*Covers her face and weeps.*)

DENIS, *taking her hand*

Mademoiselle, reflect on the little time I have before me, and the great bitterness into which I am cast by the sight of your tears. Spare me the spectacle of what I cannot cure, even with the sacrifice of my life.

BLANCHE, *rising*

A truce to gallantry, I pray you. (*Wipes her eyes.*) I am very selfish. I will be braver, Monsieur de Beaulieu, for your sake. But think if I can do you no service in the future —if you have no friends to whom I could carry your adieux. Put it in my power to do something more for you than weep.

DENIS

My mother is married again, and has a young family to care for. My brother Guichard will inherit my fiefs and my sword. Will you keep these for him? (*Takes off his sword and ring and hands them to her. She puts on the ring, takes the sword reverently, and presses her lips to it.* DENIS *turns suddenly and sees her bending over it.*)

BLANCHE

I cannot see the device. My eyes are dim. (*Passes her hand over them, then reads:*) "Do not draw me without cause; do not sheathe me without honor." 'Tis a brave motto. (*Crosses to right and places the sword before the shrine.*)

DENIS

And this reliquary, 'tis the dearest thing that I call mine. Look! Therein is a bit of the arrow which pierced the blessed Saint Sebastian. Twice has it saved me—once from an English shaft and again from the tertian ague, when we lay in the ditches before Paris. Send it, if you can, to Diane de Montrecour, Lady of Roche Vaillante, who is now with the king at Orléans. (*Takes the reliquary from his neck, kisses it devoutly, and gives it to* BLANCHE.)

BLANCHE

You love her?

DENIS

With all my heart. She is the only woman in France who will wear mourning for me.

BLANCHE

Is she married?

DENIS

Yes, unhappily.

BLANCHE

And she is young?

DENIS

She is just nineteen.

BLANCHE

And beautiful, of course? I know she is beautiful.

DENIS

You are pleased to flatter me; but her mind and heart are lovelier than her person.

BLANCHE

And have you no other message for her?

DENIS

None; she will understand, when she receives this, that her brother is no more.

BLANCHE

Her brother? It is to your sister, then, that I must convey this blessed relic! (*Kisses it with enthusiasm and puts it in her bosom.*)

DENIS

Now, may I beg of you to let me wear it until—

BLANCHE *returns it to him; he puts it on again*

BLANCHE

And is that all?

DENIS

Yes. I have few friends just now, and once I am dead I shall have none.

DENIS *sits in state chair and she kneels beside it*

BLANCHE

I am an orphan, Monsieur de Beaulieu, the last of the Malétroit, and I should have been a boy. My uncle has always hated me, and I have been lonely and unhappy all my short life. Three months ago, in church, a young captain began to stand near me, and I could see that I pleased him. I was so glad that any one should care for me that when he passed me a letter I took it home with me and read it—read it over and over again. Since that time he has written many. He was always anxious to speak with me, poor fellow! and kept asking me to leave the door open some evening, that we might talk together on the stairs. How my uncle came to suspect me, I cannot tell; but this morning, as we came from mass, he took my hand in his, forced it open, and read my little billet. It contained another request to have the door left open, and this has been the ruin of us all. Uncle kept me in my room till evening, and when he could not force me to tell the captain's name he set this snare for him, into which you have fallen. Ah, how you must despise me!

DENIS, *seizing* BLANCHE'S *hands and looking into her eyes*

And is this all?

BLANCHE, *staring at him*

Is it not enough?

DENIS, *rising and helping her to rise*

And you do not love him?

BLANCHE

I swear it. I was lonely and unhappy, and he seemed kind and gay.

DENIS

You have made me very happy, and now I have but one regret.

BLANCHE

And that is?

DENIS

That I must leave the happy world which holds you.

BLANCHE

This is mockery!—after what you have just heard. What! no hard terms, no names that stain as well as strike? Begin at once—don't keep me in suspense—and let me know that I have lost my only friend.

DENIS, *kissing her hand*

Dear lady—friend, if so indeed I may call you—forgive me. I might have known that you and innocence were comrades. And you did not love him, and you don't regret that my rude entrance here has bereft you of a bridegroom?

BLANCHE

Hear me to the end, Monsieur de Beaulieu. When I asked you to marry me, it was because I respected and admired and loved you with my whole soul from the moment that you took my part against my uncle. If you had seen yourself and how noble you looked, you would pity rather than despise me. You were like the glorious warrior angels—so brave, so pitiful to poor, guilty me. Of course, I would not dare to bare my heart to you, had I not vowed when you refused me that I would never marry you, even should you repent of your first denial. I also am too proud to force myself upon *you*, Monsieur de Beaulieu.

DENIS

It is a small love that shies at a little pride.

The daylight comes in through the casement

BLANCHE, *noticing it with a shudder*

Oh! what shall I do? (*Running towards him.*)

DENIS, *leading her to the state chair and seating himself beside her*

Lighten my last moments for me like a true and tried comrade. Let us talk of pleasant things. Help me to forget that I must soon leave you. Yours is a lonely life, you tell me?

BLANCHE

I thought we were to talk of pleasant things. What's that? (*Looking at the bandage on his hand and rising.*) You are hurt—wounded, and I have babbled on unheeding. May I not be your leech? I have some skill in surgery.

DENIS

It's not worth your pains; only a cut which gives me no concern. But if you will. (*Holds out his hand to her.*)

BLANCHE

A cut! It is a deep, cruel gash. (*Takes off his handkerchief and replaces it by her own, putting his furtively in her pouch. Takes from the credence a silver box and anoints the bandage.*) This is a balm from Padua, made by one Maestro Peter, and so prompt to heal that by to-morrow night— (*Stops and grasps the chair.*)

DENIS

You're faint. Oh, the brave surgeon to turn sick at the sight of blood! Your own, poor coward, is deserting your cheeks. Courage, courage, most valiant carver of flesh! (*Seats her in the chair and goes to credence. Pours out a beaker of wine and gives it to her. She drinks.*)

BLANCHE

Won't you pledge me? (*Hands him back the beaker.*)

WHY MARRY HIM

BLANCHE

I know little of such matters. I am a rustical, unlessoned hermit, Monsieur de Beaulieu. My only friends are my dogs and my horses, my only pleasure is in reading, and my only companion is Dame Alyse, who was young when my uncle was a squire. Day after day we sit a-stitching of tapestries. Last year 'twas the Massacre of the Innocents—a most enlivening piece. This year 'tis the Sacrifice of Isaac. I work the angel; Dame Alyse does the ram.

DENIS

And when you're weary of that?

BLANCHE

Then we change about—Dame Alyse does the angel, and I do the ram.

DENIS

Now, here's variety! And then you read—romances?

BLANCHE

Yes. I love them dearly—not so well as hawking, though.

DENIS

You like hunting, too?

BLANCHE, *with enthusiasm*

Better than aught else. Ah, Monsieur de Beaulieu, next summer you must come to Joyeuse. Such coursing as we have there! And I will match my Roland against any goshawk in your mews for what you will—

DENIS *glances at the window and smiles at her; she stops in confusion*

I wish I could. Take this for your falcon's collar, and when he rises into the blue you'll think of a friend who would fain have watched him with you. (*He cuts off a few plaques from his gold chain.*)

BLANCHE

But you'll write me a device on it.

DENIS

I'm no minstrel, and time lacks for rhyming, but I'll try. (*Scratches on the inside of the plaques with his dagger.*)

BLANCHE, *reading the scratched lines*

"I am Roland the gerfalcon.
Should you find me, have the grace
To return me to my mistress —
For reward look on her face."

'Tis a pretty posy, but more suited for a brass collar than one of gold, and I rejoice, for my blushes' sake, that it is writ on the under side.

DENIS

Since you love venery, you must read a most rare book of mine, written by Dame Juliana's self and covered with notes by Phoebus' own hand. I will send it you— (*Stops and shakes his head.*)

BLANCHE, *rising and taking both his hands*

It is folly to feign. We cannot forget that Death is waiting outside. Surely there must be some way out of this.

DENIS

My way is through the loop in yonder rope. A villain's death for one nobly born.

A cock crows in the distance

BLANCHE

Monsieur de Beaulieu, make your peace with Heaven while I watch here. It is almost morning. Go kneel for an Ave's space before the altar. You should not die unshriven.

DENIS

You'll wait here for me? You'll not desert me?

BLANCHE

You ask me that? Why, wain ropes could not drag me hence!

DENIS

Then I go; but you'll not leave me! I shall miss you so. (*Exit into chapel.*)

BLANCHE

He's gone! I must be quick. (*Raises the arras and beckons.*) Hist-st! Hugh, Hugh! Come here—softly—sh!

Enter HUGH

Hugh, you have always been kind to me, ever since I came here a little orphaned child. Do you remember how I used to ride on your sword and dress your dagger for a doll? Do you remember?

HUGH

'Deed I do, mistress. You were a mischievous little mawkin.

BLANCHE

And 'twas you taught me to ride, Hugh, and with you I made my first cast with a hawk. You were always patient with me, weren't you? and as kind as you were brave—and handsome.

HUGH

What is it? What am I to do for you, mistress?

BLANCHE

Only this. You alone guard the secret stair. Uncle trusts you as he trusts no other. Take this ring (*showing him*

DENIS'S *ring*) to the host of the Tête d'Or. Bid him send here at once the five lances of Monsieur de Beaulieu. Lead them hither by the covered way. Save a gallant gentleman's life, and earn the eternal gratitude of Blanche de Malétroit.

HUGH

Now is that *all?* 'Tis only rank treason.

BLANCHE

No; it is mercy; you save an innocent man from a vile death.

HUGH

And what is to become of me after I have played the traitor?

BLANCHE

Monsieur de Beaulieu will reward you richly, and you shall have every jewel in my casket. (*Takes off a chain and tries to put it around his neck. He prevents her.*)

HUGH

No, thank you, little lady. I'm a plain man, and I hardly ever wear jewels. How would I appear in ear-bobs? Think you a bracelet would set off this wrist?

BLANCHE

How can you jest?

HUGH, *gravely*

Sweet mistress, in this matter I cannot serve you. I would fight for you, lie for you, spill my blood for you, but turn traitor to the man whose bread I have eaten—betray his trust in me—I can't do that.

BLANCHE

Hugh, you were my last hope. Now I am indeed forlorn! (*Groans.*)

HUGH, *taking off his sword and presenting it to her*

Here, take my sword and run me through the heart, but don't make me a wretch.

BLANCHE, *taking the sword and lunging at him*

Your heart's too hard; it would turn the steel. I know a better way to have at it. (*Throws down the sword and embraces him.*) Hugh, how can we save him? My learning is at fault. In all the tales I've read there is always a henchman to be bribed, a page to smuggle a billet, a seneschal to be tricked—some way out of the trap; but here everybody is so virtuous! A disguise might—

HUGH

I wouldn't try changing clothes with him if I were you.

BLANCHE

Oh, why are you so honest, so loyal? It's horrible! The time is going—going; what shall I do?

HUGH

Why, marry him, of course, and end all this pother. We're all tired of it, and we want to get out of harness and go to bed.

BLANCHE

But he won't have me, Hugh?

HUGH

He won't have you? (*Starts for the door.*) Just let me get at him! (BLANCHE *stops him.*)

BLANCHE

He doesn't love me, Hugh.

HUGH

Well, he will when I have finished with him—that is, what there is left of him will.

BLANCHE

Dear Hugh, you don't understand. I won't have him, either, though (*whispering*) I love him dearly.

Finis

BLANCHE

What is it? Am I ugly, shrewish, dull, ill clad? Tell me; don't spare me.

HUGH

No; you're none of those. I'll tell you in a word. You see, you have no— You don't— You are not—

BLANCHE

It is most subtly defined, Hugh, but I fear my understanding is at fault. Is my defect so grave that you cannot find a name for it?

HUGH

No, no. This talking is harder work than trench-digging. You are—well, we know that you are lovely, kind, and brave, but—what you need is a little more—

BLANCHE

Yes, yes; a little more—?

HUGH

Just a touch, you know; not too much, but a trifle. It will set you off—give you an air—a er—er—a you-know-what. Oh, I am beggared in words!

BLANCHE

Oh, Hugh, what do you mean?

HUGH

It's all you need to bewitch a man, were he Saint Anthony himself. Now you have a small quarter of an hour in which to practise on *him.* (*Pointing to the chapel door.*) In with you—begin! (*Leads her towards the door.*)

BLANCHE, *in distress*

Don't leave me till you've shown me how. You were wont to talk plainly. Tell me straightly, what is it I lack, dear Hugh?

HUGH

Well! This is a new trade for me. Teach kittens to play, doves to be white, lambs to frisk, and girls to coquette. Mistress, with your leave, you're more the stripling than the maid. When you speak to a man you look him straight in the eye. Now, your gentlewoman ogles and looks down, thus—and bites her lip, and looks again sidewise, and then away with a frown. When you walk you go straightly, with no rustling of petticoats, no swing of the hips, no glance o'er the shoulder —like this. When 'tis supper-time you're hungry as a man, instead of crying, "What, meat again so soon! La! I've no stomach." When your wine-cup's filled you never say, "No; not another drop; I really cannot, and I do protest." And then you never faddle with your hair, play with your

necklace, toy with your fan, complain you are freezing while the others sweat, yawn when they laugh, or smile in sermon time—in fine, my dear and lovely mistress, you want those pretty tricks, those darling cozenries, lacking which a woman's little better than a page in petticoats.

BLANCHE

A thousand thanks! I read your lesson well, how have I undervalued you! Hugh, I stand amazed. How much you know! Where did you learn it all?

HUGH

I've paid dear for my lessons. My schoolmistresses did not learn me for nothing.

BLANCHE

Why didn't you teach me all you know? It's too late now. With death at the door, I cannot mince and grin and say (*imitating* HUGH), "Monsieur de Beaulieu, an it pleases you to bestow on me your hand and name, I'll starve at supper time, freeze when you—glow, bite my lips, cock my eye, shake my skirts, giggle when you talk sense, and when you grieve be as gamesome as my monkey." All wisdom comes too late. I must keep to my boy's ways, or I shall be like the donkey who played the lap-dog in the lame Greek's fable. (*Changing her tone and putting her hands on* HUGH'S *shoulders.*) Then you'll not help me? This is your last word?

HUGH

Don't look at me like that, or I'll turn traitor in my own despite.

BLANCHE

One grace only, I beseech of you. When you come with the others to take him, he will resist. You can do that for him with your good sword which my uncle would shamefully perform with a rope. Hugh, you cannot refuse—you are a soldier—not a hangman. Think in what a piteous plight I am when the only favor I can give the man I love is a swift and honorable death!

HUGH

If he prefers it to you, the fool deserves it. (*Goes to shrine, kisses the crucifix.*) I promise. (*Going, he turns.*) 'Tis a fine stripling and a good swordsman. Give him another chance, mistress; even if he loves you not, wedding with you is better than being hugged by a noose.

BLANCHE

Thanks, Hugh. You always over-praise me. Remember. (*Exit* HUGH. *The sky outside the window grows rosy. A trumpet-call is heard in the distance.*) They'll be on us in a moment. (*Takes the sword off the prayer cushion and goes to the door right.*) Monsieur de Beaulieu! (*Enter* DENIS.) My dear champion, take your sword. When they enter I will rush upon them with this. (*Shows him the dagger at her girdle.*) They love me—will hesitate a moment, falter, and

my death will delay them long enough for you to throw yourself upon them and find—a noble deliverance! A sword thrust is more honorable than a halter.

DENIS

Not when your life is the price of such honor.

BLANCHE

You will not rob me of the one poor service I can do you? And what sufficient reason have I for living after you are gone? (*The soldiers are heard outside.* BLANCHE *throws herself in front of* DENIS *and takes out the dagger.*)

DENIS, *sternly*

Give me that toy! (*Tries to take it from her, she resists; he wrenches it out of her hand and tosses it out of the open window.* HUGH, *at the head of the men-at-arms, appears at the top of the steps.*)

BLANCHE, *while* DENIS *holds her back*

Cruel! Cruel! (*To soldiers.*) Spare him! Ah, don't kill him; he is not the man. He is innocent! (*The men-at-arms descend the steps.*) You do not know what you are doing. Nay, never dare to touch him! I command you! I too am a Malétroit. Stand back! Ah, Raoul, Hugh, Blaise, wait one moment! I am sure you would let him go if you would only listen to me. I have such good reasons, which I will

explain if you will stay one moment. It is so difficult to think when one is hurried. This must not happen—such monstrous things are not done— Oh, pity—

HUGH

Mistress, your uncle's coming! (BLANCHE *sinks back exhausted.*)

DENIS, *quietly*

I am at your service, but I would say one word to this lady first. (*Leads* BLANCHE *to the window.*) Blanche, you have seen whether I fear death. You know well enough that I would as gladly leap out of that window into the empty air as to lay a finger on you without your consent. But if you care for me at all, do not let me lose my life in a misapprehension —for I love you better than the whole world.

BLANCHE

Oh, why didn't you say so before?

HUGH, *paternally*

Yes, why didn't you, Monsieur de Beaulieu? Think what a lot of pother you might have saved us all!

BLANCHE, *in a very small voice*

Will you marry me, Monsieur de Beaulieu, please?

Exeunt
Omnes

DENIS, *passionately*

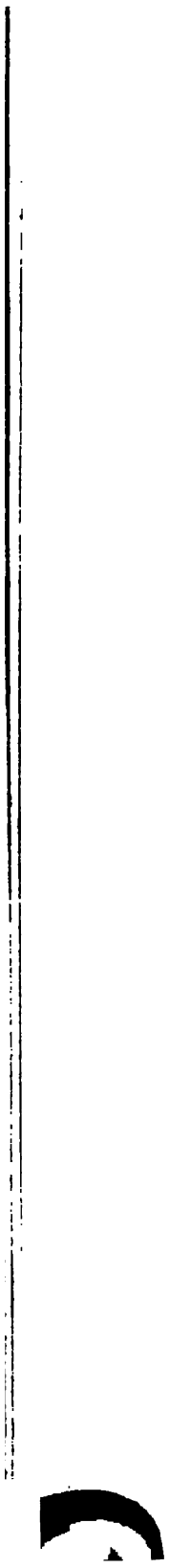
Ah-h-h! (*Embraces her.*)

HUGH *gives a whispered order and the soldiers face the other way. Enter* ALAIN DE MALÉTROIT, *unperceived by* DENIS *and* BLANCHE *still clasped in each other's arms*

ALAIN, *smiling*

Good morning, my nephew!

THE HONOR
THE



TANCRÈDE, VICOMTE DE BÉZIERS, cousin of the Marquise de Créquy.

EDME, COMTE DE SEMOULÉ, the heir of the de Semoulés.

JACQUES DE BEAUVOIR, a Parisian journalist.

RENÉ DE CRÉQUY, Marquis de Créquy, brother of Désirée.

BAPTISTE, butler of the Marquise de Créquy.

YOLANDE-ALIXE-MARIE-JEANNE, etc., DE CRÉQUY, Marquise de Créquy.

DÉSIRÉE DE CRÉQUY, granddaughter of the Marquise de Créquy.

LUCY WESTERN, an American widow.

Time, July, 1880. Place, the Château of Créquy on the Loire

THE HONOR OF THE CRÉQUY

Act I

Scene

Central hall in the château. Centre, a monumental staircase leading to the upper floor; on the landing six doors, three to left and three to right. On the ground floor right and left centre, long French windows opening on the park. Left, a carved chimneypiece; before the hearth a Louis XVI arm-chair, foot-stool, and work-table. Right, a rack with crops, sticks, and tennis-rackets, a bamboo table covered with newspapers and reviews, and several wicker lounging-chairs, on one of them a pair of driving-gloves and a leader. On the walls, above and below the gallery formed by the overhanging upper floor, family portraits—soldiers, courtiers, and beauties—hung between hunting trophies and panoplies.

Enter from door on left BAPTISTE *with newspapers, letters, and parcels, which he places on work-table at left, and begins to sort slowly.*

Enter from window on right DE SEMOULÉ, *tennis-racket in hand*

DE SEMOULÉ

The letters have come. Is there anything for me?

BAPTISTE

I do not know yet, Monsieur le Comte. Monsieur le Comte need not give himself the trouble to wait here. I will bring him his correspondence.

DE SEMOULÉ

No, thanks. I'll remain here. You *have* a cargo, Baptiste.

BAPTISTE

Truly, Monsieur le Comte, one would say that we had come to the country in order to shop by mail in Paris. Every post brings us as many packages. And the orders—they never end; and the mistakes—and the objects to be exchanged! Monsieur le Comte can imagine how much head is required to keep these affairs in order.

DE SEMOULÉ

Well, Baptiste, you have a genius for administration. You're a real Buonaparte.

BAPTISTE

Monsieur le Comte is too indulgent. If Monsieur le Comte will pardon an old servitor, I would suggest that a Sully or a

Colbert would be a more appropriate comparison to employ in *this* house.

DE SEMOULÉ

You mustn't be more of a royalist than the king, Baptiste. Well, and my letter?

BAPTISTE

Pardon; in one moment, Monsieur le Comte. (*Continues to sort the parcels.*) The "Débats" of Monsieur le Vicomte, the "Semaine Religieuse" of Madame la Marquise, the "Herald" of Mistress Western, and the "Gil Blas" of Monsieur de Beauvoir.

DE SEMOULÉ, *impatiently*

Yes, yes; but my letters?

BAPTISTE

I am coming to them, Monsieur le Comte. (*Continues his enumeration.*) The dog-biscuit of Mademoiselle, the false hair of Madame la Marquise, the digestive capsules of Monsieur le Vicomte.

DE SEMOULÉ

Very interesting, without doubt; but how long before you will finish exposing the family and distribute the letters?

BAPTISTE, *respectfully but firmly*

One must have order in everything, Monsieur le Comte. If I do not proceed with system I shall lose my head. (DE

SEMOULÉ *throws himself into a chair and lights a cigarette.*) A bill for Madame la Marquise, a message from the other world for Mistress Western, a postal card, very badly written, for Monsieur de Beauvoir. Ah, finally the letter of Monsieur le Comte! (*Puts it on a tray and presents it ceremoniously to* DE SEMOULÉ, *who pounces on it; as he does so another letter which has adhered to it drops to the floor. He picks it up.*)

DE SEMOULÉ

For Mademoiselle Désirée. From Tours. What a curious handwriting!

BAPTISTE

We do not know any one in Tours. (*Holds out the tray for the letter.*)

DE SEMOULÉ

No. I'll give it her myself. You can go.

(*Exit* BAPTISTE)

DE SEMOULÉ *seats himself and reads his letter*

Enter quietly by window on right DÉSIRÉE DE CRÉQUY. *She goes softly to* DE SEMOULÉ *and calls in his ear*

DÉSIRÉE

Cuckoo! (DE SEMOULÉ *starts, rises, and throws down his cigarette.*) Nervous! At your age! What a wreck you are!

DE SEMOULÉ

Pardon me, Mademoiselle, but as I was thinking of you, your voice startled me.

DÉSIRÉE

What a lame excuse! You were absorbed in a letter—a letter from a lady, I'll wager.

DE SEMOULÉ

Well guessed! It *is* from a lady—the Baronne de Keradec, my aunt.

DÉSIRÉE

Then it should be written on parchment, in the Gothic character, and fastened with a great seal.

DE SEMOULÉ, *coming nearer to her*

Don't ridicule my letter; there is much about you in it.

DÉSIRÉE, *retreating to the other side of the table*

It must be dull reading, then. Forsake your family papers and finish this set with me. Mrs. Western and Monsieur de Beauvoir have beaten me shamefully since you left.

DE SEMOULÉ

I am made desolate by refusing you, but I must see Madame de Créquy before dinner. This letter—

DÉSIRÉE

Will not fly away, and Granny is always better tempered after tea. Come, come, you can't refuse a distressed damsel, unless you prefer the society of *mademoiselle votre cigarette.* Your letter is only a pretext.

DE SEMOULÉ

And have you no suspicion as to what it contains?

DÉSIRÉE

No; I am of an unsuspicious nature.

DE SEMOULÉ

I mean, cannot you guess?

DÉSIRÉE, *nervously*

We don't guess any more, even in America. (*Crossing to table on left.*) The post has come, and you have had the heart to keep it from me.

DE SEMOULÉ

There is nothing there but dog-biscuit and a book for you, and—

DÉSIRÉE

Food for the flesh and the spirit. You call that nothing?

DE SEMOULÉ

And this. (*Takes the letter from his pocket and gives it to her.*)

DÉSIRÉE

How long has it been in the *poche restante?*

DE SEMOULÉ

Five minutes only, I assure you.

DÉSIRÉE, *looking at the letter*

Tours? Tours? Whom do I know in Tours? Not a soul. What a curious hand! A begging letter, of course; I get so many of them—I, who never have a penny! It will keep. (*Tucks the letter into her belt.*) Come!

DE SEMOULÉ

With pleasure. (*Rings bell on left of chimneypiece.*)

Enter BAPTISTE

DE SEMOULÉ

Give this letter to Madame la Marquise, and ask if I may see her at six o'clock.

BAPTISTE, *taking the letter which* DE SEMOULÉ *hands him*

Very well, Monsieur le Comte.

(*Exit* BAPTISTE *on left*)

DÉSIRÉE

Can you come with me now?

DE SEMOULÉ

To the end of the world, Mademoiselle.

DÉSIRÉE

No; only to the end of the lawn.

(*Exeunt by window on right*)

Enter the MARQUISE DE CRÉQUY *from window on left, with* DE SEMOULÉ'S *letter in her hand. Seats herself in the arm-chair by the hearth, looks over the parcels, and unfolds the letter. Sound of wheels outside.*

Enter the VICOMTE DE BÉZIERS, *accompanied by* BAPTISTE *with a portmanteau which he carries up-stairs to third door on right of landing. Exit* BAPTISTE *through said door.*

THE MARQUISE, *rising*

At last! I am so relieved that you have returned! I never had more pressing need of your counsel and your aid.

DE BÉZIERS, *kissing her hand and seating himself on left*

I suspected as much from your telegram, and here I am. Count on my devotion and command my services. First, what has happened? Has the king sent you a manifesto, or has Désirée run away?

THE MARQUISE

Worse than that! René has.

DE BÉZIERS

What?

THE MARQUISE

Run away.

DE BÉZIERS

From his regiment? Deserted? He, a soldier and a Créquy! Impossible!

THE MARQUISE

He is only half a Créquy, you remember.

DE BÉZIERS

But that is enough to hold on to the other half. How did it happen—how could it happen?

THE MARQUISE, *leaning back in her chair*

It will be such a consolation to tell you all. I have been forced to control myself so long. You can imagine the state of my nerves.

DE BÉZIERS

Will you not begin at once, dear cousin? I am all impatience.

THE MARQUISE

Naturally. Well, you know that, though I had chosen a diplomatic career for René—

DE BÉZIERS

The refuge of all spoiled children. He couldn't manage his own estates, so you thought that he could direct European affairs.

THE MARQUISE

No. I wanted him to figure at courts, for, in spite of his American mother, René has the "grand air."

DE BÉZIERS, *moving uneasily in his chair*

Pardon me, but what relation is there between René's appearance and your present misfortune?

THE MARQUISE

I am coming to it, cousin, if you will be as patient as you are energetic.

DE BÉZIERS

Pardon my impatience; it arises from my desire to be of immediate service to you.

THE MARQUISE

A thousand thanks! I fear that you find me nervous, agitated, even irritable, but I have suffered so much.

DE BÉZIERS

Yes, of course you have been annihilated; that goes without saying. René, then, ran away?

THE MARQUISE

Yes. When the news arrived, like you, I refused to believe it.

DE BÉZIERS

And in detail this news was?

THE MARQUISE

Unbearable, my cousin, insupportable! I had a nervous attack when I received it, and all yesterday—

DE BÉZIERS

And what steps did you take? What did you do?

THE MARQUISE

I went to bed immediately and took *eau de mélisse*, but there are blows which no *tisane* can soften.

DE BÉZIERS

You sent no word?

THE MARQUISE

Yes, immediately to my doctor.

DE BÉZIERS, *in despair, changing his line of attack*

Who knows of this besides yourself?

THE MARQUISE

Désirée only.

DE BÉZIERS

Good! What did she do?

THE MARQUISE

Put me to bed, sent for the doctor, telegraphed to you, entertained our guests, and invented any number of excuses to account for my illness and our confusion.

DE BÉZIERS

She's worthy of her grandmother. *She* should have gone into diplomacy. My dear cousin, we must use despatch as

well as discretion. Tell me, without delay, what has happened?

THE MARQUISE

It is a long story.

DE BÉZIERS, *sighing*

I am sure of it.

THE MARQUISE, *suspiciously*

Eh? (DE BÉZIERS *looks at her with an expression of elaborate guilelessness, and she continues.*) You may remember, four months ago René began his year of military service.

DE BÉZIERS

His *volontariat*—yes.

THE MARQUISE

From the first the subalterns, all of them more or less republicans, were unreasonably severe with him. They were envious of his name, his position, and imposed on him the hardest and most disgusting tasks. His pride, the pride of the Créquy, revolted, and he refused to perform them.

DE BÉZIERS, *rising suddenly*

Sacrrrrrré nom d'un—sabre! Pardon, but I can't hear such enormities unmoved. (*Sits down again.*)

THE MARQUISE

I am glad to see that you share my indignation. Well, to abridge (DE BÉZIERS *sighs*) a long recital of petty tyrannies, my poor René was always in disgrace for some outbreak, and passed five out of seven days in prison.

DE BÉZIERS, *earnestly*

But, my cousin, surely you lectured him. Naturally, you showed him how unmanly his conduct was. It was his country, not his sergeant, that he was refusing to serve.

THE MARQUISE, *with dignity*

I know my duties, and I try to perform them. I did reason with—René's colonel.

DE BÉZIERS

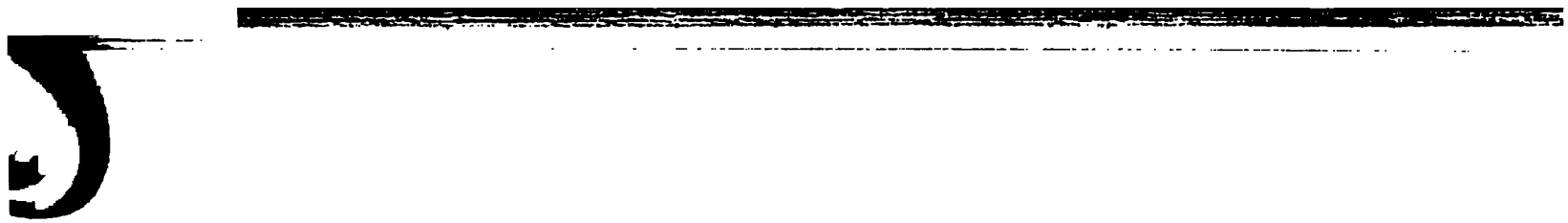
With Lemors? That martinet—that manual of military discipline! How did he receive your remonstrances?

THE MARQUISE

Ill—very ill. He also referred to René in terms which I cannot repeat.

DE BÉZIERS

Were they so very bad?



THE MARQUISE

Yes—no—I don't know. I have forgotten, for I didn't understand them. They were incomprehensible to me.

DE BÉZIERS

An old soldier would hardly speak the language of Voltaire—or of Madame de Créquy. But pity my suspense, and continue.

THE MARQUISE, *reflectively*

I wrote them down. Have the goodness to ring, and I will send for my note-book and show them to you.

DE BÉZIERS, *rising and walking up and down the room*

Mais—saperlipopette!—we are losing time, and every instant is precious.

THE MARQUISE, *nettled*

Dame! What would you? You asked me for details, and I am giving you details. Will you listen to them? Yes or no? They are to leave or to take!

DE BÉZIERS

Le diable m'enfourche si je—

THE MARQUISE

You were saying—?

DE BÉZIERS, *controlling himself with an effort*

That time is invaluable if we are to act effectively. Was René helped by your intercession?

THE MARQUISE

Incredible as it may seem, they were even more harsh with him than before.

DE BÉZIERS, *sitting down again*

Sapristi! How strange! (*Aside.*) To think that at twenty-five I almost broke my heart because I couldn't marry her! Lord, I thank thee for thy many mercies!

THE MARQUISE

Eh, my cousin, you who have escaped the sorrows of domestic life have much to be thankful for.

DE BÉZIERS

So I was just thinking, cousin. Let me know, I conjure you, the immediate cause of the catastrophe. Remember the value of every moment. Pardon me if for once I beg so charming a talker to assume the style of the reporter; imagine that you are telegraphing to me.

THE MARQUISE *pauses a moment and begins rapidly*

Day before yesterday, while the officers were giving a breakfast to some comrades from another garrison, René, who had also been breakfasting copiously, rode his horse into the mess-room, and, sword in hand, made the tour of the table, breaking the glasses as he passed.

DE BÉZIERS, *rising*

Sacré nom d'une pipe! Pardon, I can bear no more.

THE MARQUISE

It *was* a horror, wasn't it? Then he was out again before they could stop him. René rides like a centaur.

DE BÉZIERS

Saprelotte! The moment is badly chosen in which to commend his horsemanship, though I admit that if he had been one of Dumas's mousquetaires it would be an amusing episode instead of a calamity. He was finally arrested and—

THE MARQUISE

Put in prison, of course, but managed to escape the same evening, leaving a note—very witty and well turned, by the way—to his sergeant.

DE BÉZIERS

Peste soit de son esprit! (*Sits down and reflects a moment.*) You don't know where he is?

THE MARQUISE

No.

DE BÉZIERS

To whom would he naturally turn when in trouble?

THE MARQUISE

He *ought* to confide in me, of course; but I fear that the misguided boy prefers to put his trust in his sister.

DE BÉZIERS

And she has not heard from him? (*The marquise shakes her head.*) Keep an eye on Désirée's correspondence. He may try to communicate with her.

THE MARQUISE, *turning over the parcels*

There is nothing here but dog-biscuit and a volume of Coppée.

DE BÉZIERS

There is a complication in this matter, cousin. The act of amnesty now before the Senate, framed especially to pardon the insurrectionists of '70 and '71, also includes deserters

from the army. This saves René from death or expatriation, and at the same time publishes his misconduct to the world.

THE MARQUISE

And a Créquy would despise such a shameful pardon.

DE BÉZIERS, *sternly*

A deserter should not. René must be found and forced to return in time to save his honor.

THE MARQUISE

And ours.

DE BÉZIERS

He must be compelled to realize the gravity of his offence. How should you like to read his name on the list of the pardoned between a *pétroleuse* and a communist?

THE MARQUISE, *shuddering*

He *must* be found!

DE BÉZIERS

He has had a long start. I will telegraph at once to Colonel Lemors, who is an old comrade of mine; we made the African campaign together. Then a message to Limier—he is the best agent for private and domestic work, I think. With your permission. (*He rings.*)

Enter BAPTISTE

DE BÉZIERS

Have Topsy saddled at once. I'll go alone to the telegraph office. No groom.

BAPTISTE

Very well, Monsieur le Vicomte.

(*Exit* BAPTISTE)

THE MARQUISE

What a comfort you are! Shall we ever have done with the misfortunes the American marriage has brought upon us?

DE BÉZIERS, *aside*

I can't stand another jeremiad, and her notions of causation are so confused! (*Aloud.*) I remember that the American dowry came into the family at an opportune moment.

THE MARQUISE

Yes, indeed! René's father had run through everything, and we were mortgaged up to the eyes when Miss Wainwright accepted him.

DE BÉZIERS

Therefore, cousin, you should have felt some gratitude to the American heiress, especially as she pushed consideration to the point of dying as soon as she had provided an heir for the Créquy.

THE MARQUISE

But she took my son's heart with her, and a year afterwards we buried the rest of him.

DE BÉZIERS

Which proves that she must have been a captivating person, for constancy was never a quality of the Créquy— (THE MARQUISE *looks at him. He adds hastily*)—men.

THE MARQUISE

She was charming, but always in revolt. My poor René inherits her spirit of insubordination. Have you not often remarked what insurgents, what revolutionists are these American grandchildren of mine? Conventions do not exist for them. They take nothing for granted. It was because René felt the ferment of this blood that he could not yield to discipline.

DE BÉZIERS

Permit me to be of another opinion, my cousin. The Prince de Joinville, who participated in their Civil War, has often spoken with me of the military talent of the Americans. Their uniforms left much to be desired, and, as in England, there was no commissariat, but they lacked neither fortitude, patience, nor discipline. René is not an American. He is a French noble— (*aside*) terribly spoiled by his grandmother.

THE MARQUISE

And Désirée. Is she not untamed? She was rebellious before she went to America to visit her relatives. Now she is emancipated.

DE BÉZIERS

You should not have let her go.

THE MARQUISE

But they were so insistent, and so rich, and so childless. It wouldn't have been considerate to refuse.

DE BÉZIERS

Well, at least she isn't the uglier for it, and she doesn't lack a stock of pretenders who seem willing to brave the dangers of independence. By the way, whom have you in the house?

THE MARQUISE

De Semoulé, an aspirant.

DE BÉZIERS

And the best of good matches. Everything that is most eligible.

THE MARQUISE

A formal demand for Désirée has just reached me from Madame de Keradec. Do you care to see it?

DE BÉZIERS

Not now. Who else?

THE MARQUISE

Jacques de Beauvoir.

DE BÉZIERS

Everything that is most ineligible—that is, unless his uncle and cousin should have the kindness to die and leave him the title and the money. He is too attractive to be a safe acquaintance for a romantic girl like Désirée.

THE MARQUISE

He was invited to amuse Mrs. Western.

DE BÉZIERS

And who is Mrs. Western?

THE MARQUISE

An American friend of Désirée.

DE BÉZIERS

Pretty?

THE MARQUISE, *shrugging her shoulders*

That's according to taste.

Enter BAPTISTE

BAPTISTE

The horse of Monsieur le Vicomte is ready.

DE BÉZIERS

Very well. Is she young?

BAPTISTE

Five years this spring, Monsieur le Vicomte. (*Aside.*) He knows that as well as I do.

DE BÉZIERS

You can go, my friend. (*Exit* BAPTISTE.) I meant Mrs. Western.

THE MARQUISE

In the thirties. Don't let me detain you, as every moment is precious.

DE BÉZIERS

Divorced, of course?

THE MARQUISE

No, a widow. What a cross-examination! Topsy dislikes to stand, and the telegraph operator is—

DE BÉZIERS

A widow! Is it possible? I never heard of an American widow except the spouse of Washington. Are you sure?

THE MARQUISE, *impatiently*

I haven't seen her husband's certificate of decease, but he died while Désirée was in America. The telegraph operator dines early, my cousin, and you should hurry; we must use despatch as well as discretion.

DE BÉZIERS, *aside*

Attrape, mon vieux! (*Aloud.*) I go; I fly to the station. *Au revoir.* (*Aside.*) Young, pretty, a widow—*Tiens, tiens, tiens!* And I expected nothing but annoyances here. Sometimes one *is* rewarded for doing one's duty.

(*Exit* DE BÉZIERS)

THE MARQUISE *opens the* BARONNE DE KERADEC'S *letter*
Enter DE SEMOULÉ

DE SEMOULÉ

Madame, if you are occupied I will wait.

THE MARQUISE

I was re-reading Madame de Keradec's letter. Her courtesy makes me overlook the extreme informality of your proposal.

What are we coming to? The hand of a Créquy was never sought with such scant ceremony before.

DE SEMOULÉ

Pardon the impatience of an anxious lover. My aunt de Keradec will arrive in a few days, but I could not wait for her. She doesn't travel; she makes "progresses" like Louis XIV. Mademoiselle de Créquy is so surrounded, so courted that I was tempted to make haste. Say that you pardon my lack of punctilio!

THE MARQUISE

You must not fancy, dear Edme, because my granddaughter is half American, and has contracted some deplorable habits in that country of liberty, that we do not require all the usual forms—even, perhaps, a little more ceremony than is customary, because she is inclined to disregard it.

DE SEMOULÉ

My Breton aunt will supply that. Even in our family she is called Madame *l'Étiquette.* Then you accept my offer?

THE MARQUISE

Provisionally, yes, though I am a little shocked by its lack of form. I cannot accustom myself to these republican manners.

DE SEMOULÉ

Yet you accept. (*Kissing her hand.*) How happy you have made me!

THE MARQUISE

Of course nothing is really settled until I have seen Madame de Keradec and your lawyers.

DE SEMOULÉ

What does Mademoiselle Désirée say?

THE MARQUISE

I haven't had time to tell her yet.

DE SEMOULÉ

May I find her for you?

THE MARQUISE

Yes, if you will. And—don't look so ridiculously happy.

DE SEMOULÉ

I am afraid I can't help it, Madame.

(*Exit* DE SEMOULÉ *on right*)

THE MARQUISE *takes out her letter again*

Enter DÉSIRÉE *from window on right.* THE MARQUISE *rises and embraces her*

THE MARQUISE

My dear, sweet child! I have good news for you.

DÉSIRÉE, *eagerly*

Then you have heard something. I thought so when I saw our cousin gallop away. Tell me all—this moment.

THE MARQUISE

Cousin Tancrède has not been consulted yet. As head of the family I have already decided. This letter—

DÉSIRÉE

Read it to me at once. I beg of you!

THE MARQUISE

Really, my dear, you are a little too eager.

DÉSIRÉE

Scold me afterwards—read it first.

WHAT
SHALL
I DO

THE MARQUISE

The Baronne de Keradec—

DÉSIRÉE

What does *she* know about René?

THE MARQUISE

Nothing, fortunately, my dear; but this letter is a formal demand for your hand.

DÉSIRÉE

Yes, yes; but how about my brother and your good news?

THE MARQUISE

Alas! we have none, my poor child; but we are doing all that we can to find him. Madame de Keradec hopes to be here—

DÉSIRÉE

Where has Monsieur de Béziers gone?

THE MARQUISE

To the telegraph office to send to Paris for a private detective.

DÉSIRÉE

Is that all he can do? What did he say—what did he advise?

THE MARQUISE

Désirée, you are too excited to be told at present. You have a little fever. Go and drink a large glass of sugared water with some orange flower in it.

DÉSIRÉE, *throwing herself on her knees before* THE MARQUISE *and taking both her hands*

Dear grandmother, let me stay; be indulgent to me for once. I, too, am suffering. For hours I have talked and laughed and run after a ridiculous ball with such a leaden heart! Let me help if I can; and if I can't, let me go away alone and cry.

THE MARQUISE

This is weak and selfish of you, Désirée. If you really wish to aid us, you will continue to control yourself. Think of René, think of *me*, and be calm!

DÉSIRÉE

I will try. Now, what can I *do?*

THE MARQUISE

Accept Edme de Semoulé like a brave girl. Your brother is in good hands. Our cousin has many resources.

DÉSIRÉE

Please explain some of them to me; and I would rather not marry Edme de Semoulé, if you don't mind.

THE MARQUISE

Why, may I ask?

DÉSIRÉE

He isn't my type.

THE MARQUISE

It pleases you to treat a grave matter with deplorable lightness. What are your objections to Edme?

DÉSIRÉE

Their name is legion.

THE MARQUISE

Mention one.

DÉSIRÉE

Eh! It is difficult.

THE MARQUISE

Did I not say so?

DÉSIRÉE

I admit that he has all the negative virtues.

THE MARQUISE

Do you prefer the positive vices?

DESIRÉE

Yes, a few of them. What I mean is that he lacks personality. He is just like all the other young men of his class.

THE MARQUISE

What do you ask for? A genius, a Bonaparte—an exception to human kind? I fear that you will not find one, and if you should, he is not likely to be a marrying man. Be reasonable. Edme is noble, rich, elegant, and madly in love with you. What more do you want?

DÉSIRÉE

Some one whom I can love and admire, who has worked, suffered, achieved. Edme de Semacle has never done anything for himself. He is elegant, thanks to his tailor; rich by inheritance; and noble because he has "taken the trouble to be born." He is a kind of superior mechanical toy, a product of other people's knowledge and energy.

THE MARQUISE

And your ideal is the self-made man? That is the American phrase, is it not? To have wisely used one's advantages is, then, to have lacked character?

DÉSIRÉE

No; but a man should not only *have*—he should *do* and *be*.

THE MARQUISE

Don't forget that Edme *is* a gentleman, and that means a great deal if you reflect upon it. Perhaps you also do not realize that much *having* means *doing*.

DÉSIRÉE

It means keeping, of course. In spite of your reasoning, he still seems to me a spoiled child of fortune rather than a man. Besides, I don't love him.

THE MARQUISE

Marry him first, and love him afterwards. Who will prevent you?

DÉSIRÉE

Who knows? Suppose I should meet some one afterwards who—for whom I might feel— (*Hesitates.*)

THE MARQUISE

The electric spark, the *coup de foudre*, as you call it in this scientific age? The self-manufactured person of your dreams?

DÉSIRÉE

Yes.

THE MARQUISE

That will be your husband's affair. Pride is an excellent lightning-rod, my child.

DÉSIRÉE

Love is a better one. Besides, I am afraid of French husbands.

THE MARQUISE

Are there any others for a Créquy?

DÉSIRÉE

You found an American wife for one.

THE MARQUISE

A wife? That is different. Your mother became a Créquy.

DÉSIRÉE

Not entirely; and her children are only half French—nay, only one third, for the mother makes us most.

THE MARQUISE

And the grandmother not at all, I see.

DÉSIRÉE

Don't be ashamed of us. The American eagle is as fine a bird as the Gallic cock, though he needs more space and flies over your barnyard walls.

THE MARQUISE

I never supposed that the eagle was a domestic bird. Look at the American divorces!

DÉSIRÉE

At least he has only one mate at a time, while your Gallic—

THE MARQUISE

Hush, Désirée! I am shocked!

DÉSIRÉE

We were talking of natural history—

THE MARQUISE

Instead of something more important. This is a serious matter. Désirée, my dear little girl, come here close to your poor old grandmother, who scolds you and bores you, but who loves you tenderly. (DÉSIRÉE *seats herself at* THE MARQUISE'S *feet.*) Listen to me, and don't believe me hard or cruel. Whatever you may think or desire, my child, you are a Créquy. You have a name to sustain, and a duty to perform to those who have gone before you. Obligations are laid upon the women of a noble house as well as upon the men. It is our part to uphold the dignity of the family even by the sacrifice of our happiness. René has forgotten his duty; you, by unselfishly performing yours, can make amends for his wrongdoing. You don't belong to yourself. A *parvenu* or a

gypsy can ignore traditions and the high claims of ancestry and live for the felicity of the individual, but we, who possess a past and hope for a future, have a larger destiny to fulfil.

DÉSIRÉE, *rising*

Granny, you touch me, but you do not convince me. You argue that I should marry Monsieur de Semoulé because my remote progenitors would approve of it. How do I know that they would, by the way? If I had two lives I would live one to gratify my ancestors, who lived theirs to please themselves. Having only one, I will follow their example.

THE MARQUISE

There is no obligation that one cannot reason away. Yours are the morals of the savage, Désirée—no, I wrong the savage. He possesses tribal feeling, and has been known to sacrifice himself for a brother.

DÉSIRÉE

A brother! What do you mean?

THE MARQUISE

I mean, if you must have it written large, that the de Semoulés have rallied to the support of the republic and possess political influence; that the minister of war is Edme's godfather. René needs friends; give him a powerful one.

DÉSIRÉE

Can we not appeal to Monsieur de Semoulé as a friend for help?

THE MARQUISE

After we have refused him as a husband? He would then display a fine zeal in René's cause, would he not? He adores you, Désirée; you can do what you will with him.

DÉSIRÉE

Please let me think a moment. This means a great deal to me. No, what is the use? If Monsieur de Semoulé will help René, I'll marry him—and be miserable. There!

THE MARQUISE, *kissing her*

My dear one, never fear; in seeking the happiness of others, you will find your own. And, Désirée, how well the arms will quarter! I have already thought of a charming combination for the linen.

DÉSIRÉE

Can we tell him about René at once?

THE MARQUISE

I must wait until I have consulted our cousin. We may have some good news before to-morrow which will show René in a better light. Until then I must pledge you to secrecy, my dear.

DÉSIRÉE, *indifferently*

As you will. Arrange it to suit yourself.

THE MARQUISE

My little one, you have lifted a weight from my heart. I have not been a happy woman, Désirée. I lost my son in his youth; I have seen the invasion of France, the proclamation of a republic, and the disgrace of the Marquis de Créquy. And now you have made me glad. Isn't that worth something? Come here, Madame la Comtesse, and embrace your poor old Granny.

DÉSIRÉE, *kissing her*

Are you sure this sacrifice—for it *is* one—is necessary?

THE MARQUISE

I know, my dear; but I am too happy to play the rôle of the mourning Agamemnon. We will deck the victim with the historic Semoulé sapphires. How they will become you!

DÉSIRÉE

Granny, you hurt me—don't! One condition, please: I am not to be hurried into this marriage. I will have a long engagement.

THE MARQUISE, *in trepidation*

But not *à l'Américaine*. No rides in bogheys, no evening rambles.

DÉSIRÉE

It will be *à la française*, if you will, or even *à l'espagnole*, if you prefer it. If Monsieur de Semoulé dies for me, he can sigh for me a while.

THE MARQUISE

But he may not submit to these fantastic arrangements. Take care; you may lose him.

DÉSIRÉE

Then I'll be an old maid, and dress St. Catherine's hair.

THE MARQUISE

One says that, but one doesn't mean it.

DÉSIRÉE

I do. I have no vocation for matrimony.

THE MARQUISE

So I told Monsieur de Beauvoir yesterday.

DÉSIRÉE

You told him I was averse to marriage—but apropos of what? He spoke of me? What did he say? Dear Granny, tell me quickly.

THE MARQUISE

There is no occasion for excitement. We were discussing the modern young girl, and I cited you as an instance. What can it matter what that *boulevardier* thinks of you?

DÉSIRÉE

He is much more than a *boulevardier*. He is a writer of eminence.

THE MARQUISE

He is, above all, a good swordsman, and supports his opinions with the point of the small-sword. No wonder his articles are authoritative.

DÉSIRÉE

He makes himself respected even by those who are too prejudiced to appreciate one who has cleared his own road to distinction.

THE MARQUISE

Ah! The self-manufactured person again. *Tiens!* have you joined the ranks of Monsieur de Beauvoir's many admirers? He has a large assortment of them.

DÉSIRÉE

Which, as he hasn't a penny, proves his attractiveness.

THE MARQUISE, *aside*

She praises him too openly to care for him. (*Aloud.*) Then, Désirée, it is decided, is it not?

Enter DE BEAUVOIR

THE MARQUISE

Will you be my crutch as far as the garden, Monsieur?

DE BEAUVOIR, *giving his arm to* THE MARQUISE, *with a wistful glance at* DÉSIRÉE

Too much honored, Madame.

(*Exeunt by window on right,* DE BEAUVOIR *laden with wraps*)

DÉSIRÉE *seats herself by table on left, sighs heavily, and leans her head on her hand. Takes the letter out of her belt and is about to open it; lays it on the table as* DE BEAUVOIR *enters.*

DE BEAUVOIR

I have come back for Madame de Créquy's fichu. I have just settled her comfortably.

DÉSIRÉE, *rising and giving him the fichu*

What Esquimaux old people are! She started wrapped as though she were going on a polar expedition. You are sad, Monsieur de Beauvoir.

DE BEAUVOIR

I am, Mademoiselle.

DÉSIRÉE

It is dull for you here after Paris. Even Mrs. Western cannot amuse you. You are losing your spirits. You need another duel, perhaps, to enliven you.

DE BEAUVOIR

Happiness is grave, and the happiest days of my life have been spent under this roof—and the most wretched as well.

DÉSIRÉE

You literary people are so paradoxical! Is that a reflection on our hospitality? What can we do to make *all* the days pleasant?

DE BEAUVOIR

Nothing, Mademoiselle. I am like the puppy who cries for the moon. It is a grotesque spectacle, yet the poor beast suffers.

DÉSIRÉE

He at least tries to tell the moon the cause of his sufferings.

WE'RE ALWAYS DOING THE MOST EXCITING

DE BEAUVOIR

Because he is a puppy, and does not realize that she is quite out of his reach. Pardon me, I interrupt you. (*Glancing at the letter on the table.*)

DÉSIRÉE

Only a letter from some poor person, probably. There is a great deal of suffering in the world, Monsieur. We are not the only unhappy ones.

DE BEAUVOIR

We?

DÉSIRÉE

I am not swimming in felicity, either. Perhaps it is part of the scheme of things. It makes one kinder, doesn't it, to suffer?

DE BEAUVOIR

If one can relieve it. Otherwise the sight of it embitters. But you—why should you feel pain?

DÉSIRÉE

We *all* have our moons and— Granny hasn't her fichu! What a tardy Mercury you are! Hurry, hurry, Monsieur!

DE BEAUVOIR

But I must ask you—

DÉSIRÉE

No; you must not ask me anything. She's sneezing now, I am sure of it. Run—run, *please!*

DE BEAUVOIR

Why will you never talk seriously to me for two consecutive moments. I want—

DÉSIRÉE

Please go now; *she* will soon want something else. *Au revoir.*

(*Exit* DE BEAUVOIR *by window on right*)

DÉSIRÉE *watches him off, shakes her head, takes up her letter again, and reads*

"You, who have always been my good angel, do not desert me now. You have heard of my folly. If you can find the money for me I will go to America and begin a new life. Don't betray me; my life depends on your secrecy. I will be at the King's Oak in the park at three o'clock to-morrow morning. Meet me there if you still love me. I promise you that I will yet prove worthy of your tenderness, and of all the sacrifices you have made for me in the past."

René is found, thank God! No wonder I did not recognize that disguised hand. Now, what shall I do? I cannot count yet on Edme's influence with the minister, nor can I persuade René to return to the regiment—to be imprisoned or shot.

And to take refuge in America is to bid farewell to honor. I must give him the money, and leave him free to choose for himself. And where is the money to come from?

Enter DE BEAUVOIR

DE BEAUVOIR

Madame de Créquy wants a footstool. What is the matter, Mademoiselle; are you ill?

DÉSIRÉE, *crumpling up the letter and thrusting it into her belt again*

Yes—no. I was a little startled at your entrance. This heat sets my nerves on edge.

DE BEAUVOIR

You look pale. Can I get you anything?

DÉSIRÉE, *hysterically*

Yes; find me a true friend and a wise adviser, and on your way to Olympus to borrow Persuasion, stop at the Crédit Lyonnais and draw me five thousand francs.

DE BEAUVOIR

Are you jesting, Mademoiselle, or do you really need help?

DÉSIRÉE, *more quietly*

Not from you, Monsieur de Beauvoir. But you can counsel me. You have had much experience.

DE BEAUVOIR

Of a kind. Well?

DÉSIRÉE, *with difficulty*

They tell me—I have heard—that you are not very good. Is that true?

DE BEAUVOIR *bows his head silently. After a pause*

DE BEAUVOIR

Remember that I have not always known *you*, Mademoiselle.

DÉSIRÉE, *collecting herself*

Indeed, it was not to question you that I asked. It was because you possess a knowledge of the world which I have not acquired. Do you believe, judging from your own experience, that a person still young, and with a kind heart, who has committed a great error, can be reclaimed?

DE BEAUVOIR

Yes; I think so, because I am convinced that an older person who has been guilty of more than one misdeed could, under

certain circumstances and with the prospect of certain rewards, renounce the error of his ways and become quite exemplary.

DÉSIRÉE

You don't realize the gravity of the offence. I meant a real misdemeanor—something which, if known, would dishonor the culprit and his family.

DE BEAUVOIR

What do you mean? You alarm me.

DÉSIRÉE

Do you think that the sacrifice of the happiness of an innocent individual to the welfare of a guilty one is the best means of reclaiming the wrongdoer?

DE BEAUVOIR

It puts the wrongdoer under a terrible obligation to be reclaimed. Mademoiselle, you trouble me; what have you to do with wrongdoing and dishonor? You do not even realize what these large terms mean.

DÉSIRÉE

I cannot tell you; to do so would be to violate a trust. And don't look at me like that. Forget that I am a girl and you are a man, and think of me as a human creature in distress who seeks your help.

DE BEAUVOIR, *losing his self-command*

My help! Ask me for the last drop of my blood, and you shall have it. You know that I have no will but yours. Dispose of your own according to your pleasure.

DÉSIRÉE

Hush—hush! It is all so hopeless! I am the *fiancée* of another man. Let us forget these insane words; it is my fault that they were uttered.

DE BEAUVOIR

Why do you torture me so? Haven't I been on the rack ever since de Semoulé's courtship began? Why do you fill my mind with miserable doubts of you?

DÉSIRÉE, *looking into his eyes*

I swear to you, on the word of a Créquy, that though I am wretched I am doing no wrong. Don't you believe me?

DE BEAUVOIR

How can I help believing you, when you speak to me in a certain voice? I am no longer mad; don't be afraid that I shall lose my head twice. Accept a word of advice from me —let no man bind you to secrecy, and tell your trouble to de Béziers before you sleep. He is a safer father confessor for you than I am. Perhaps some day you will realize what it

costs me to reject the office. *Dieu vous garde, mademoiselle.* (*Goes towards door on right as* MRS. WESTERN *and* DE SEMOULÉ *enter it.*)

MRS. WESTERN *to* DE BEAUVOIR

Well, of all perjured persons you are the worst! We have had time to build a cairn with garden gravel for the ancestor's feet while you were supposed to be fetching her footstool.

DE BEAUVOIR

I've such a poor memory!

MRS. WESTERN

You had better go and apologize while I make tea. No, she won't need one now. She's in a good humor, and is talking archaic scandal with a neighboring antiquity who has come to call.

(*Exit* DE BEAUVOIR)

Enter BAPTISTE *with the tea service, which he places on the bamboo table, then lights the lamp under the kettle, and waits on right.*

DE SEMOULÉ

Can I assist you, Madame? Permit me. (*Puts three scanty spoonfuls of tea into the pot.*)

MRS. WESTERN

Twice as much more, if you please. If yours is the French method of making tea, I don't wonder that Balzac called it "an insipid and melancholy beverage." Désirée, come here and help me. Comte, there's a draught on the lamp. (MRS. WESTERN *seats herself at the table,* DÉSIRÉE *crosses to right, and* DE SEMOULÉ *closes the French window.*)

MRS. WESTERN *to* DÉSIRÉE

What is the matter with de Beauvoir? Has he said anything? Really, it isn't fair of you! He was destined to be my prey, and you've been poaching on my preserves. I shall have to fall back on the Vicomte, if he isn't too much damaged! Where is he?

DÉSIRÉE, *hurriedly*

I must speak to you. Get rid of them, please.

MRS. WESTERN

Comte, go and ask the Marquise how many cups of tea I am to send out, and what fauna and flora she will take with it to-day. Thanks so much. (*Exit* DE SEMOULÉ *by window on right.*) Baptiste, go and hunt on the lawn for a powder-puff rolled up in a lace handkerchief. If you don't find it there, search the garden; if it's not in the garden, examine the urns on the terrace, and then, if you don't succeed, try the fountain —and be thorough, Baptiste. (*Exit* BAPTISTE *on right.*) Now, my dear, unfold; they'll be gone some time. It will

take your obsolete relative fully five minutes to decide on the particular pharmaceutical delicacy she'll qualify her tea with to-day, and as for Baptiste— (*Shows the handkerchief tucked into her sleeve.*) It will do him good. Stooping is excellent to reduce the stomach. Divulge—I am all ears.

DÉSIRÉE

Lucy, promise me that you will never tell.

MRS. WESTERN

Never? I solemnly promise not to do so until you have told all your friends first.

DÉSIRÉE

Don't jest; it's tragic enough to me. I am engaged, and I want you to lend me five thousand francs.

MRS. WESTERN, *smiling*

To de Beauvoir? To buy the ring with?

DÉSIRÉE

No; to Edme de Semoulé.

MRS. WESTERN

Grands dieux! as you say. What for?

DÉSIRÉE

Not to amuse myself, I assure you. I can't explain, but we need protection, and he can help us.

MRS. WESTERN

Can't you obtain it in any other way? Marriage lasts a long time, especially in this country, my little Désirée. And if it is de Semoulé, why do you need money?

DÉSIRÉE

For something else. I cannot ask any one but you. Don't question me about it, but if you can, let me have it.

MRS. WESTERN

You shall have it, my dear, to-morrow or next day.

DÉSIRÉE

I need it at once—to-night.

MRS. WESTERN

It is fortunate that I cashed a cheque on Monday. Come to my room before dinner, and I'll have it ready for you. Mum's the word, of course. When did the betrothal take place?

DÉSIRÉE

An hour ago.

MRS. WESTERN

Is this the mean, furtive way in which alliances are arranged? I expected a trumpeting herald on horseback to demand the hand of the *haulte et puissante damoiselle de Créquy,* or at least the grenadier aunt in a post-chaise, surrounded by Breton henchmen with bangs and bagpipes. And where are the sacks of gold and the contracts to sign and seal, and the faithful retainers carousing on the lawn, and the mayors and the notaries, and the *corbeilles?* Well, French nobility *has* degenerated. Désirée, I am disappointed in you.

DÉSIRÉE

Patience, my dear; we'll have them all later. Granny and Monsieur de Semoulé have only just settled it.

MRS. WESTERN

Without consulting you?

DÉSIRÉE

She told me of it immediately afterwards.

MRS. WESTERN

And you accepted without any shilly-shally? Well, we fast Americans go by slower stages in the affairs of the heart. De Semoulé is well bred, well broken, has an unimpeachable pedigree, and fetches and carries to perfection. And he has as many castles as Puss in Boots, and lots of ancestral hardware?

DÉSIRÉE, *sadly*

Yes. Every one will be delighted.

MRS. WESTERN, *rising*

Accept, then, my congratulations and my best wishes for your future happiness. (*Embraces* DÉSIRÉE *formally, and suddenly clasps her in her arms.*) My dear girl, don't marry a man you can't love. Think of the heaven you miss.

DÉSIRÉE

I can't do otherwise. I've thought it over, and, as you say, Monsieur de Semoulé is—

MRS. WESTERN

"Heavy, heavy—damned heavy." Don't be shocked; that's Pickwick. You know de Semoulé wearies you, and indeed he is a most palpable bore.

DÉSIRÉE

Don't, Lucy; you're speaking of my *fiancé*.

MRS. WESTERN

Don't let them coax or bully you into a loveless marriage. Fight—resist; I'll help you.

DÉSIRÉE

You don't understand; it is of my own free will that I marry him.

MRS. WESTERN

I give you up. I don't understand you. Perhaps it is because you are such a mixture; I never can tell which element will be uppermost—the French or the American. And sometimes one predominates, sometimes the other.

DÉSIRÉE

You mean that I have a piebald character. Perhaps you are right.

MRS. WESTERN

With due respect to you, my dear, I should put it in a prettier way. What do you call variegated ice-cream in French? I've forgotten.

DÉSIRÉE

Panachée?

MRS. WESTERN

That's it. You have a *panachée* nature, and I can only sympathize with the American half. Oh, my kettle! How sad it is that whenever we try to philosophize and rise into the pure ether of abstract thought, some material kettle always boils over! (*Returns to the table, sits down, and pours out the tea.*) If you change your mind, even after the cadi and the scrivener arrive, I'll stand by you.

Enter DE SEMOULÉ, *followed by* BAPTISTE, *mopping his face*

BAPTISTE

Madame, I have searched everywhere. I fear that the dog of mademoiselle has eaten the handkerchief of madame.

MRS. WESTERN

Let us hope that it will not give him a false digestion, as you say. Take out this tea and the rum, and the araki, and the orange-flower water to the marquise. (*To* DE SEMOULÉ.) I won't mix them myself. The result looks too much like an aquarium to seem wholesome. Baptiste, don't forget Monsieur de Beauvoir's absinthe. And you—what can I do for you?

DE SEMOULÉ

No tea, thank you. I have already had a *madère* and a *madeleine*. Monsieur de Béziers is just returning, I think.

Enter DE BÉZIERS. *Kisses* DÉSIRÉE *on the forehead, and shakes hands with* DE SEMOULÉ

DÉSIRÉE

Lucy, may I present the cousin of whom I have so often talked with you? Mrs. Western, Monsieur le Vicomte de Béziers.

DE BÉZIERS *takes the hand which* MRS. WESTERN *extends to him and puts it to his lips, then shakes it awkwardly*

MRS. WESTERN

I was deeply interested in your family all last winter, and there is so much that I want to ask you about. But first let me give you some tea.

DE BÉZIERS

Tea! (*Aside.*) *Quelle drogue!* (*Aloud.*) No, thank you, Madame; I am quite well. What good fairy has awakened your interest in the de Béziers?

MRS. WESTERN

A glass of Malaga and a cake, then, Vicomte. I suppose tea is an innovation despised by the *ancien régime* people. I belong to a history class, and last winter we studied mediæval France, and, as you know, the de Créquy and the de Béziers were always doing the most exciting things. (*Pours out a glass of wine for* DE BÉZIERS *and gives it to him.*) Is it true that an ancestor of yours broke the nose of King Richard at Fontevrault in revenge for that—unpleasantness at Chaluz?

DE BÉZIERS, *aside*

She begins well! To recall to me the only Béziers who was ever hanged! (*Aloud.*) It is a family legend, Madame.

MRS. WESTERN

Désirée tells me that your castle of La Ferté still retains the archers' walk around the walls.

DE BÉZIERS

I hope that some day you will do me the honor to make the tour of it, Madame. I have some portraits there, also—

MRS. WESTERN

Yes; I have read of them, and I am most anxious to see the one of Agnes Sorel. They say it is prettier than Fouquet's.

DE BÉZIERS

But, Madame, it is you who will have to be my guide there. You know my possessions better than I do.

MRS. WESTERN

You Frenchmen are such flatterers! I am glad that I took that history course, though; with the stereopticon views, it makes Touraine, and the old families, and the antiquities much more fascinating (DE BÉZIERS *grimaces. She perceives it and continues*)—though there are some people and some things which have so much intrinsic charm that it seems hardly fair that they should also possess that which association lends them.

DE BÉZIERS, *aside*

Elle tâche de me faire oublier mon pendu, et elle s'y prend gentiment.

MRS. WESTERN

I have heard that you continue the family tradition, and have also been a soldier.

DE BÉZIERS

In '70, of course; what Frenchman was not one then? In Sénégal also, and when I was a youngster I made the Sicilian campaign with the "Thousand."

MRS. WESTERN, *rising and seizing* DE BÉZIERS'S *hand*

You were with Garibaldi? This is the most exciting moment of my life! I must shake hands with you. Sit down and tell me all about it! Is it true that you were warned beforehand of all Bomba's movements?

DE BÉZIERS, *somewhat embarrassed yet charmed, begins to narrate his Sicilian adventures*

DE SEMOULÉ *to* DÉSIRÉE

Madame de Créquy has told you, Mademoiselle?

DÉSIRÉE

Yes; and I accept, Monsieur.

DE SEMOULÉ

What adorable frankness!

[illegible]

DESIREE

[illegible]

DE SEMACLE

[illegible]

DESIREE

[illegible]

DE SEMACLE

[illegible]

[illegible]

THE EARLESS

[illegible]

DE BEAUVOIR *to* DÉSIRÉE

You are better? Please tell him to-night; it is the only favor I ask of you.

DÉSIRÉE

I can't. Don't blame me, and don't think ill of me.

DE BEAUVOIR *turns away.* DÉSIRÉE *goes up-stairs, dropping the letter from her belt as she does so, and disappears on the landing to right.*

DE BEAUVOIR *and* DE SEMOULÉ *talk together on the left*

MRS. WESTERN

You are too fascinating to leave, Vicomte, but I must dematerialize. Thank you so much; it is only a Frenchman who can talk really well about himself.

DE BÉZIERS

I have been very egotistical, Madame. After dinner I hope that you will permit me to question you in my turn. I have always been interested in the New World, though I possess only old books on the subject. Fenimore Cooper and Chateaubriand early aroused my interest in the Indians, and I should like to know more of them. Do they mix socially with the whites, or do they constitute a society apart? Do you visit many Indian families?

MRS. WESTERN

I never saw an Indian in my life, except the basket Indians at Saratoga and other watering-places.

DE BÉZIERS, *meditatively*

I never heard of the basket tribe, but if, as you say, the Indians now frequent watering-places, they have certainly changed much since the days of Uncas.

MRS. WESTERN

It will take too long to explain how much. By the way, what is this hunt—this *rallye papier*—for to-morrow morning?

DE SEMOULÉ

It is merely an excuse for a gallop. You call it a paper hunt in English.

MRS. WESTERN

And in American?

DE BÉZIERS

I doubt if you have anything so tame in the country of great lakes and boundless prairies, where you hunt the bison and the grizzly—

MRS. WESTERN

And the aniseed bag.

DE SEMOULÉ

You can, however, break your neck at a paper hunt if you will.

MRS. WESTERN

You reassure me—but how? Describe the manner of it.

DE SEMOULÉ

It is a hunt with a human fox. For instance, to-morrow I play the rôle of Renard, and lead the chase through the forest, with a bag filled with scraps of paper on my back. I have an hour's start; I double, make détours, and follow as circuitous a course as I can, scattering from time to time a handful of the scraps. An hour or so later the hunt follows, and tracks me by means of them.

MRS. WESTERN

It sounds amusing, and almost reconciles me to rising at five o'clock to-morrow.

DE BÉZIERS

May I be your cavalier?

MRS. WESTERN

I have already accepted the escort of Monsieur de Beauvoir. I can't say that I regret it, as he is within earshot. *Au revoir, tout le monde.*

(*Exit by staircase and door on left of landing*)

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

One moment. If you are to escort Madame Vesset, you will need a few directions. You are neither of you at home in the forest. Let me make you a rough map of it.

DE BEAUVOIR

You know it then?

DE SEMOULE

As well as my own park. If I had a bit of paper— (Looks on the table.) I believe every scrap in the house has gone into my bag. (Sees DÉSIRÉE's letter lying on the settee.) This will do. (Smooths it out, and, laying it on the table, begins, without opening it, to write on the blank side of the sheet. DE BEAUVOIR *leans over him.) Here are the cross-roads: be sure to keep to the right of that clump of beeches; there's a bad piece of ground between them and the clearing. Leave the brook on your left when you turn here. There! you can't get lost with that, unless in such charming company you should desire to do so. We ought to finish before the sun is too high. (Gives* DE BEAUVOIR *the map.)*

DE BEAUVOIR

We leave here at half after five o'clock. What an hour!

DE SEMOULÉ

It's too warm to ride late in the day in this hothouse of a Touraine. Pity *me.* I start at four o'clock.

DE BEAUVOIR

So early?

DE SEMOULÉ

Yes. Remember that with my détours and doubling I go over the ground three times. I'm off. *Au revoir.*

(*Exit by door on right of landing*)

DE BEAUVOIR *examines the paper and turns it over carelessly, sees and reads the letter on the reverse of the sheet. Puts it down, passes his hand over his eyes, and then re-reads the letter and presses his fists to his temples.*

DE BEAUVOIR

Wait a moment! Let me be quite sure. She was reading this when I came in. Yes, and she said something about five thousand francs and needing a friend. She couldn't tell de Béziers—no—that would be betraying a trust. (*Laughs bitterly.*) And she looked into my eyes and lied! How can she be so false with such a face! And I would have sworn that she was candor itself! *La coquine, la drôlesse!* To lie with such good eyes! It is not possible! To have given the treasure of herself to this whining cur. (*Looks again at the letter.*) "The sacrifices you have made for me in the past."

I must not think of them. Such thoughts lead to the madhouse. Bah! She isn't worth it. "You have been very wicked, Monsieur de Beauvoir"—and I could have knelt to her! Well, well, the woman I loved never existed except in my own fancy. It's none of my affair, and this is her property. She'll soon miss it. (*Rubs out the map on the back of the sheet and replaces the letter on the stairs.*)

Goes to window on right and waits. Enter DÉSIRÉE, *looking anxiously about; she picks up the letter, and slips it into the front of her gown.*

DE BEAUVOIR *watches her, unseen*

Act II

Same scene, quite dark except for a small night-lamp on the table.

Enter DÉSIRÉE *in a long cloak with a hood. She goes quietly down-stairs, opens the window and steps out, closing it as well as she can from the outside. As she leaves the window, enter* DE BEAUVOIR *softly from the door of his room. He remains on the landing a moment, and then disappears through the same door.*

The stage remains vacant a few seconds.

A bell rings; the barking of dogs, the opening and shutting of doors, are heard outside.

Enter BAPTISTE, *carrying a candle and a telegram. Looks at the ill-closed window, shakes his head, and shuts it. Goes up-stairs and knocks at door on right.*

BAPTISTE

Monsieur le Vicomte! (*Muffled imprecations from the other side of the door.*) Yes, Monsieur le Vicomte, a telegram. Pardon, will Monsieur le Vicomte have the goodness to repeat? I am a damned imbecile? *Bien!* Monsieur le Vicomte. From the ministry, and the messenger is hurried, extremely hur-

ried, Monsieur le Vicomte. A special message from Versailles—from— *Where* did Monsieur le Vicomte tell me to go to? Ah! I am mute, dumb as a carp. Is there any answer? I *am* putting it under the door. None? I am retiring without saying a word, though I found that those lazy valets had left the windows open, and we might have been pillaged and assassinated. Do I hear? Fifty francs' *pourboire* to the messenger. (*Goes down-stairs grumbling.*) Ah! no, that is not just. Fifty francs for a young man, almost a boy, who has only taken the trouble to saddle a horse and carry a telegram. It's too much. And I, who have risen, dressed, and brought that same telegram up all these stairs, do not even receive a thank you. *Ça ne se passera pas comme ça.* Twenty francs will be amply sufficient for that young man; the rest is my commission. Take service with the great if you desire ingratitude. I rise, dress, climb many stairs, and am sent to the devil for my pains. It is enough to make one turn republican!

(*Exit* BAPTISTE)

Reënter DE BEAUVOIR *from his room on the landing. He looks at his watch and then opens the window*

Enter DÉSIRÉE, *panting*

DE BEAUVOIR

Hurry, Mademoiselle! De Semoulé may be down any moment. Quick, or you will be discovered!

DÉSIRÉE

I am already, it seems. Why are you here?

DE BEAUVOIR

To save you from the consequences of your folly.

DÉSIRÉE, *haughtily*

You are very good, I am sure. Since when have my affairs become your concern?

DE BEAUVOIR

Since your letter fell into my hands. Don't try to justify yourself! Spare me the pain of putting you to the blush.

DÉSIRÉE

But I have done nothing to blush for. Did I not give you my word that I was doing no wrong?

DE BEAUVOIR

Yes; with a look of such divine innocence that I longed to throw myself at your feet. My heart strives to believe you even now when you speak to me, when you look into my eyes; but how can I with that letter seared into my memory? You say you are wretched. You don't know what misery is! You haven't seen your idol broken—not only broken, but defiled. You don't realize what you were to me; you don't know what you stood for. Ah! Go, go!

DÉSIRÉE

Not until you think better of me. Promise me to suspend your judgment until I am able to explain my actions. I shall be, some day.

DE BEAUVOIR

Have mercy on me, Mademoiselle! Do not try to brazen it out. Leave me one poor rag of illusion. Let me think of you as misled by your love for one unworthy of you. It has been agony enough to have proved you weak and light; do not let me find you impudent as well.

DÉSIRÉE, *indignantly*

How dare you!

DE BEAUVOIR, *sternly*

Remember that I have read your lover's letter—that I saw you go to your appointment.

DÉSIRÉE, *loudly and angrily*

I—a lover! I! You lie, Jacques de Beauvoir—you lie!

Enter DE SEMOULÉ *from door on right of landing*

DE SEMOULÉ, *running down-stairs*

What is the matter? De Beauvoir! Mademoiselle! What does this mean?

DE BEAUVOIR

I have just met Mademoiselle, who has this moment returned from the stables, where she has been dosing Snob, who is sick.

DE SEMOULÉ

And why are you here?

DE BEAUVOIR

I unfortunately mislaid the map you made me, and came down here to waylay you for further information.

DE SEMOULÉ, *suspiciously*

Why didn't you come to my room?

DE BEAUVOIR

I was afraid of awaking our neighbors.

DE SEMOULÉ

Mademoiselle Désirée, will you kindly go up-stairs immediately? The next time your dog needs attention at such an unseemly hour you will be good enough to delegate the care of it to one of the grooms.

DÉSIRÉE

Monsieur de Semoulé, you have not yet acquired the right to use this tone to me, and when I have told you the real cause

of my presence here you will probably never care to possess that right. (*To* DE BEAUVOIR.) No, Monsieur, I will not allow a gentleman who has such a horror of untruths to shield me with any more falsehoods. (*To* DE SEMOULÉ.) Monsieur met me two minutes ago as I was entering this window. He assumed that my absence from the house was due to some dishonorable motive. I assured him that I had nothing to be ashamed of, and that some day I hoped to explain matters. He continued to doubt my word, and—

DE SEMOULÉ

Pardi, that doesn't astonish me! Now, Mademoiselle, *I* request you to justify yourself to Monsieur and to myself at once by solving this mystery.

DÉSIRÉE

Unhappily, I cannot. I have promised secrecy to another person.

DE SEMOULÉ

But you had no right to do so; it is your duty to speak. I command you!

DÉSIRÉE

And I refuse to obey you. If you cared for me, you would accept my simple assertion, unsupported by evidence.

DE SEMOULÉ, *taking* DÉSIRÉE *aside*

You don't realize what you are asking of me. It is frightful to live in ignorance of the acts of the woman one loves!

I want to have you all to myself, to know your thoughts even, and you coolly declare that you have a secret understanding with some one else! Can't you comprehend the unreason, the cruelty of it? I ask for nothing that I am not more than ready to give. But while I would gladly abandon my whole life to your scrutiny, you are, at the cost of your reputation, hiding something from me. Désirée, when you gave me your hand you resigned your independence; you no longer belong to yourself.

DÉSIRÉE *shakes her head and turns from him*

DE BEAUVOIR

Let us respect her secret. Don't torment her. She is probably more sinned against than sinning. Mademoiselle, pray go!

DE SEMOULÉ

No; I insist upon an explanation. I will not allow her to remain mute under such imputations. Mademoiselle, if you have done wrong, you owe it to me to confess it; if not, your duty to yourself obliges you to speak.

DÉSIRÉE

And my duty to some one whom I love better than either compels me to remain silent.

DE BEAUVOIR, *taking her hand*

One who loves you would prefer to have you clear yourself. I entreat you to speak!

DE SEMOULÉ, *taking the other hand*

As your *fiancé*, I order you to speak!

Enter DE BÉZIERS *from door on right of landing, with a telegram in his hand; he looks down on the group below*

DE BÉZIERS

What has happened now? (*Runs down-stairs.*) Gentlemen, unhand my cousin! What is it, Désirée?

DÉSIRÉE

They are insisting that I shall tell them where I have been.

DE BÉZIERS

And where have you been?

DÉSIRÉE

You, too? Cousin, forgive me; I can't tell you. I have given my word.

DE BÉZIERS

But, my dear child, you are in a very compromising situation. I absolve you from any promise that you have made to anybody. (*Patting her hand.*) Collect yourself, and tell us. I am sure it can't be very bad. (*To* DE BEAUVOIR, *handing him the telegram.*) Here's a line in my despatch which con-

cerns you. I regret to be the bearer of evil tidings. Come, Désirée, our friend here must start immediately for Marseilles, and I can't have him leave you in this doubtful position. Explain at once!

DÉSIRÉE

I cannot! I *must* not!

DE BÉZIERS

Evasion only harms you, Désirée, and inclines us to believe that you have something to conceal.

DÉSIRÉE

How often have I told you that I have promised secrecy? I must stand to my word as you would to yours. Are promises to be held sacred only as long as it is pleasant to do so? You are noble—have you no idea of honor, of keeping faith with the helpless? You are gentlemen, and yet you are ready to believe that a carefully nurtured gentlewoman—no, what is better, an honest girl whom you have always found truthful—is deceiving you for some shameful reason. I do not understand what baseness you suspect me of. Your doubts would crush me if I did not despise them. Monsieur de Semoulé, I give you back your word. Monsieur de Beauvoir, you have insulted one who is defenceless. My cousin, I looked to you for vindication, and you have put me to shame. Oh, why don't you believe in me! Is there not something irresistibly convincing in the accent of truth? Can you look in my face and doubt me?

Enter MRS. WESTERN, *in a peignoir, from room on left of landing*

MRS. WESTERN, *leaning over the rail*

No; I can't, and I don't believe they can, either. (*Coming down-stairs.*) Whatever you have stated, Désirée, I'll swear is true. But what is the matter? (*To* DE SEMOULÉ.) It is quite time you started. Désirée, why are you not dressed? (*Glancing at the telegram.*) Bad news? I am interrupting a family council, I fear. Shall I go, or can I be of use?

Enter THE MARQUISE *in a morning déshabillé and a laced cap*

THE MARQUISE

What's all this noise? I thought our guests had arrived. Something has happened? (*Descends the stairs.*) What do these funereal faces mean? Désirée, why are you here in this toilette?

DÉSIRÉE, *in grim desperation*

I was obliged to go out at three o'clock, and when I returned these gentlemen met me and wanted to know where I had been.

THE MARQUISE

What? Is she crazy? It is inconceivable! Nothing like this has ever happened here before. (*To* DE BÉZIERS.) My cousin, do you call this decent? Is it a practical joke? Have

you the answer to this riddle? (*Talks with* DE BÉZIERS, *who draws her aside.*)

MRS. WESTERN

Was it to gather May dew for the complexion—I hear you do it here—or to pay a bill, Désirée? Never mind; I'll stand by you if the ancestress is unpleasant.

THE MARQUISE, *shaking* DÉSIRÉE *by the shoulder*

Finish this pleasantry; you can't understand to what misconstruction it exposes you.

DÉSIRÉE, *sullenly*

I cannot. You are the last person who should desire me to speak.

THE MARQUISE

Hein? But this is absurd! And she looks as though she were in earnest! Speak.

DÉSIRÉE, *calmly*

It is impossible!

THE MARQUISE

Nom d'un petit bonhomme!—and yet I haven't the habit of swearing. But you announce this enormity to me with such calmness! It is too inhuman to endanger the honor of a family with such tranquillity. These are the manners of Sioux! Perhaps they are American, I do not know. What can I say

to you? *Mon Dieu, mon Dieu,* I have borne much, but this cross is too heavy for me!

DÉSIRÉE, *bursting into tears and throwing herself into* MRS. WESTERN'S *arms*

Lucy, Lucy, take me away. Not one of my own people trusts me!

DE BEAUVOIR

Madame de Créquy, I have the honor to ask you for the hand of Mademoiselle.

MRS. WESTERN

Bravo! Athos is still alive!

THE MARQUISE

Monsieur, this is very precipitate.

DE BEAUVOIR *to* DÉSIRÉE

Mademoiselle, I believe you. I have no proofs, but I am convinced that yours are the accents of truth. Give me the right to defend that belief.

DÉSIRÉE

How can I thank you for your faith in me?

MRS. WESTERN

By complying with Amadis's request, my dear! You're surely not going to let this romance go out of the family. It's real Dumas; give him your hand, and let us sing a Te Deum.

DÉSIRÉE

I cannot so ill repay your generosity as to profit by it. I have been smirched by insinuations, suspicions—

Enter from window on left RENÉ DE CRÉQUY

RENÉ

Who suspects my sister? My little knight, how faithful you were to me!

DÉSIRÉE

Oh, why did ycu return?

RENÉ

To give myself up and suffer the chastisement which I deserve. After you left me, *sœurette chérie*, I was tempted to take one last look at the old house. As I neared the open window I heard voices. Pardon me—I listened. Dear one, your fidelity to your word, your mute defence of me, went straight to my heart, and I determined to deserve your love by redeeming my honor. Grandmother (*to* THE MARQUISE), I won't ask you to forgive me until I have earned your pardon. Cousin (*to* DE BÉZIERS), I am going back to my garrison, will you accompany me?

THE MARQUISE

Oh! my René, what will they do to you?

DE BÉZIERS

Nothing very dreadful, for the law of amnesty passes to-day.

RENÉ

Good-by, Désirée. You must sustain the honor of the Créquy alone; I think you can.

THE MARQUISE

But you at least, René, will explain this mystery. (THE MARQUISE, DE BÉZIERS, DE BEAUVOIR, *and* MRS. WESTERN *gather about* RENÉ.)

DE SEMOULÉ *to* DÉSIRÉE

Why did you not trust me? Can you forgive my suspicions?

DÉSIRÉE, *smiling*

Indeed I can, and I am most grateful to you. To them I owe my knowledge of Monsieur de Beauvoir's chivalry. I could thank you for them.

DE SEMOULÉ

Does that mean that all is finished between us?

DÉSIRÉE

It was hardly begun, was it?—and certainly did not go far enough to spoil our old friendship. I still count on it, Monsieur de Semoulé.

DE SEMOULÉ

I am not quite resigned enough to play that rôle yet. You have never cared for me, then? Do you think that I have deserved this?

DÉSIRÉE

No. You deserve something far better—a wife who loves you.

DE SEMOULÉ *turns away from her, then goes back*

Mademoiselle, I will say good-bye to you now, as directly after the hunt I shall go back to Semoulé, and I may not see you again for some time. I will write to Madame de Créquy. Accept my sincerest vows for your future happiness. (*To the group about* RENÉ.) *Au revoir, mesdames et messieurs.*

(*Exit* DE SEMOULÉ)

DÉSIRÉE *loosens her cloak.* DE BEAUVOIR *offers to assist her*

DÉSIRÉE

It's done, thanks. You haven't congratulated me on my rehabilitation, nor apologized for your mistrust of me, as Monsieur de Semoulé has just done.

DE BEAUVOIR

I saw that he had, Mademoiselle, and that you were most indulgent.

DÉSIRÉE

What perspicacity! It was his reward for being so prompt.

DE BEAUVOIR

He had every reason to be, Mademoiselle.

DÉSIRÉE

And you?

DE BEAUVOIR

I confess, to my shame, I regret that you are no longer in need of a champion, and that you do not want my poor assistance.

DÉSIRÉE

But I do, Monsieur, and you promised it me, and for a long time. I still hold you to your word unless you offered it only out of pity.

DE BEAUVOIR

Pity! Yes, it was out of pity—for my starving, longing. desirous self.

DÉSIRÉE

And you have none left for poor me? Must I instigate Granny to ask your intentions.

DE BEAUVOIR

Ah! Désirée, Désirée!

THE MARQUISE *to* DE BÉZIERS

Do you notice that, my cousin? Do you call that civilized? Are we in Kamschatka or Chicago? They ignore my presence, they defy decorum! How are we to end this, and recall de Semoulé?

DE BÉZIERS

Wait a moment! I have some more news for you which has just reached me from the ministry. The bodies of de Beauvoir's uncle and cousin were washed ashore with the wreck of their yacht on the island of Sainte Marguerite yesterday. (THE MARQUISE *crosses herself.*) I handed the telegram to him just before he made his declaration.

THE MARQUISE

As I was about to say when you interrupted me, cousin, I hope that Désirée has given de Semoulé a definite dismissal. She should do so after showing her preference for Monsieur de Beauvoir with such barbaric frankness. How chivalrous it was of him to come to the rescue as he did, and to believe in her so blindly! He will certainly make a good husband.

MRS. WESTERN *to* DE BEAUVOIR

She's coming to congratulate you. Sit up and beg pretty.

THE MARQUISE

Monsieur de Beauvoir, receive my condolences and my sincere sympathy with your sorrow. You have had a great blow. We shall have a mass served in the chapel to-morrow morning. I suppose you leave at once?

MRS. WESTERN

Is this the mediæval, aristocratic form of congratulation to a *fiancé?*

DÉSIRÉE

I don't understand, dear.

MRS. WESTERN

Neither do I, nor have I for the last half hour. These lightning-change engagements are bewildering to the Occidental mind. Don't shake the kaleidoscope again, please, until I've had my coffee. Marquise, can't you give us our *congé* in true classic fashion by blessing Désirée and telling Monsieur de Beauvoir to "take her, my boy!"

THE MARQUISE, *smiling and shrugging her shoulders, puts* DÉSIRÉE'S *hand into* DE BEAUVOIR'S

IN
CLEONS
GARDEN

DRAMATIS

PERSONÆ

IN CLEON'S GARDEN

Scene

A garden. Right, a porch, with seats on either side of house door. Left centre, and left, a high wall, surmounted by vases filled with plants and flowers, running across the back of the stage; in the middle this wall is broken as though it had been forced inward on the garden bed at its base. Left, an arbor overhung with grape-vine, under it a semicircular marble seat and a wall fountain, the water falling from a lion's mask into a small basin. Right centre, a chair, with a scarf and parasol lying on it. A peacock is sunning itself on the wall, doves are drinking at the fountain, and ECHO, *the parrot, meditates in a cage hung from one of the beams of the arbor.*

ECHO, *in a low voice, almost a whisper*

Lysis! Lysis!

A rough, curly head rises above the gap in the wall, and LYSIS *looks eagerly into the garden, waits a moment, listens, and then sinks out of sight.*

ECHO, *plaintively*

Come back, come back to her who loves you.

The head of LYSIS *again appears*

ECHO, *sardonically*

Ha! ha! ha! (*Chuckles evilly.*)

LYSIS *shakes his fist at the parrot and disappears*

Enter AMPHIONE *by house door on right, glances at the windows, saunters about the garden, gathers a rose, dabbles her hands in the fountain, and finally, going to the gap in the wall, calls in a low voice, almost a whisper.*

Lysis! Lysis!

An indignant growl is heard behind the wall

AMPHIONE, *in a slightly louder tone*

Lysis! Lysis!

ECHO, *in an ecstasy of malevolent delight, flapping his wings*

Ha! ha! ha! Donkeys to sell, donkeys to sell, donk—!

AMPHIONE, *going to the parrot and stroking its head*

You do well to mock me. I'll wait no longer for that sluggard. Good-bye, Echo; good-bye, pretty bird! (*Crosses to the porch on right and lingers an instant at the door.*)

IN CLEON'S GARDEN

Enter LYSIS, *climbing over the wall and leaping down into the garden*

LYSIS

You here, at last.

AMPHIONE, *with dignity*

Health to you, Lysis!

LYSIS

By Herakles! I have need of it, and of patience also. If you count by heart-beats I have waited a century for you, and have been insulted by your bird into the bargain.

AMPHIONE

I should think you were rating a tardy slave. You have had but little experience, Lysis, if you don't know that girls are always late. Besides, *I* am not; I have been calling and calling you until even the parrot laughed at me for a fond fool.

LYSIS

It is not the first time that I've noticed that you are more considerate of his feelings than of mine.

AMPHIONE

Well, of all the absurdities! It will puzzle even a pupil of Socrates to prove that.

LYSIS

Heartless one! You know I am too distracted to prove anything but my insensate love for you. Since I learned that your sister is to be married to-day, and thus the only obstacle to our wedding is removed, I have quite lost my head as well as my heart. I am the butt of all my comrades; only yesterday, when the Master bade me define harmony, what do you think I answered?

AMPHIONE

How can I tell?

LYSIS

I said, "Her eyes are just the color of the agates in Clitopho's mantle-clasp," and shamed myself before them all.

AMPHIONE, *sadly*

Poor Lysis! I am so sorry. (*With animation.*) Are they, truly?

LYSIS

And this morning at the barber's, when the bungling apprentice asked me how I would have my hair trimmed—

AMPHIONE

He *was* a bungler. I thought you looked unaccountably queer to-day.

LYSIS, *piqued*

Were you ever satisfied with the cut of it? When you have quite finished your criticisms of my appearance I'll continue.

AMPHIONE

Criticisms indeed! That remark was a graceful preamble to a request for a lock of it. What did you answer, dear one?

LYSIS, *mollified*

I said, "In little clusters of curls quite hiding the ears." I can hear them laugh still. Too much joy has driven me out of my wits.

AMPHIONE

Never mind; I'll help you find them again.

LYSIS

We will look for them together. Amphione, do you realize that I shall no longer be obliged to sneak into this garden like a thief, and tantalize my famished eyes with stolen glimpses of you? But you're not half as happy as I am!

AMPHIONE

I pity my sister, Lysis. She who desires to consecrate her life to her husband's memory is forced to remarry, which to her seems sacrilege.

THINK
THAT

LYSIS

Yet your father is right. She is young, and Gryllus is not the first comer. Athens still echoes with his triumphs at the games. Cleon (health and long life to him!) is old and her child has no protector, but what I never understood was why he insisted on deferring our wedding until she had accepted a husband.

AMPHIONE

That is because he is so systematic. It is against the rules of all well-ordered families that the younger sister should marry before the elder is disposed of. Poor Clea, the hope of making us happy has counted for much in her yielding to my father's commands.

LYSIS

Then she no longer believes that Charmides is alive?

AMPHIONE

I do not know; for years she held fast to the hope of his return. She says he promised her to come back, and some of our soldiers did escape, you know.

LYSIS, *sadly*

It were kinder to wish that he found a speedy death on the field.

AMPHIONE

Indeed, I hardly think a delicately bred gentleman could survive the torments the Syracusans (on whose heads may the earth lie heavy!) inflicted on our soldiers.

LYSIS

Amphione, when I remember how those Sicilians treated their Athenian prisoners, branding them like cattle, penning them in those hideous quarries to freeze at night and burn by day, to die of hunger and thirst, to rot while still alive—when I think of what our friends and kinsmen endured, I forget even you, my girl, in a raging, impotent desire for revenge.

AMPHIONE

Your picture is incomplete. You have forgotten the gay folk who walked the pit's edge at sunset, and leaned down over the charnel-house to mock at the ill-starred captives whom unkind Death had slighted. Oh! for the last two years we have been crammed with horrors. Every Athenian who escaped has told his piteous story in my father's house; to every ship that hailed from the west we've sent for news; we have sought Charmides as Demeter did her daughter, but not with her good fortune.

LYSIS

And yet to-day Clea weds Gryllus.

AMPHIONE

Most unwillingly. Father has so beset her with prayers, entreaties, threats, arguments, and endless disputation. If she kissed her boy, he'd shake his head and groan, "Poor, helpless child; he's quite defenceless in an evil world." If by chance I sighed—

LYSIS, *coming close to her*

You sighed for me, and never would confess it. You feared to make me too happy, I presume.

AMPHIONE, *crossing to the other side of the stage*

Lysis, you promised that if I'd meet you here you would always stand three paces off.

LYSIS, *stopping*

Then I overestimated my capacity for resistance; it is at such promises that Zeus laughs. Like Hippolytus, "my tongue has sworn, yet my mind is free."

AMPHIONE

You are not in the least like Hippolytus, who was a very modest young man.

LYSIS

And came to grief in consequence. Well, I'll renew my promise if you'll tell me why you sighed.

AMPHIONE

Agreed. I sighed—of course I sighed—because my girdle was too tight.

LYSIS

You wasp!

AMPHIONE

It always is when my heart aches for you.

LYSIS, *fervently*

You honeycomb! (*Throws himself flat on the pavement and grasps her robe.*)

AMPHIONE

Your promise!

LYSIS

I *am* three paces off. There! There! There! (*Kisses the hem of her chiton.*)

Enter by door on right CLEA *and* DORIS

LYSIS *leaps to his feet,* AMPHIONE *hurries to the fountain and caresses one of the doves*

AMPHIONE, *aside*

Be calm, Lysis, and look innocent, as I do.

CLEA, *seating herself in the chair on right and handing the scarf and parasol to* DORIS

Health, Lysis! Why are you here?

AMPHIONE, *playing with the dove*

It is all the fault of the dove that naughtily flew away. Lysis happened to be on the other side of the wall, and—

CLEA

That is where he should be now. Lysis, be patient. In a few days you can carry yonder little plague and her doves home with you, though you won't need the doves there. Now, go before my father returns.

LYSIS

Farewell, Clea—farewell, Amphione.

(*He climbs over the wall and disappears*)

AMPHIONE

Can I help you, Clea?

CLEA, *smiling*

No. You had better clip your dove's wings, Amphione.

AMPHIONE

Not for the world, Clea; they are too useful.

(*Exit by door on right*)

CLEA, *turning quickly to* DORIS

You have no news for me?

DORIS

Mistress, if I had, would I have waited for your question?

CLEA

You made every inquiry—spared no pains?

DORIS

I did your bidding as you yourself would have done it. If I do not know my lesson now, it's not for lack of repetition. I am the fable of the port, the custom-house officers break stale jests on me, the meanest bargeman gibes at me and says it's not a husband but a lover that I seek, and the common sailors proffer—

CLEA

Peace! You found the ship from Catana—you asked the captain—

DORIS

If he had heard aught of one Athenian, Charmides of the Alcmæonidæ, once taxiarch of hoplites, now prisoner or slave in Sicily.

CLEA

And you offered the reward for information?

DORIS

Yes; poor mistress, how often have you been disappointed!

CLEA

This is the last time. Gryllus's wife will send no more. (*Covers her face with her mantle.*)

DORIS, *touching* CLEA'S *arm timidly*

Mistress, you have done your duty by a dead husband, and now there is a live lover at your door; you have waited for Charmides four long years—

CLEA

Penelope waited twenty.

DORIS

In the old days, when a body had plenty of time. Here's your father.

Enter CLEON

What, daughter, idling here when it is nearly noon and nothing done? Still mourning, always grieving, even while your wedding dinner is on the fire. You should end the threnody before you begin the epithalamium. Was ever man so plagued by wilful girls? A third daughter would send me to the tomb.

CLEA

Would I were in mine!

CLEON

May the gods be deaf to such impious wishes! You are thrice blessed, Clea—in your son, in your bridegroom, and in your over-indulgent father.

CLEA

Indulgent! When he bids Charmides's wife take another lord?

CLEON

His widow, you mean.

CLEA

For me he lives.

CLEON

These are sickly fancies. Gryllus will cure you of them. Clea, for two years, moved by your prayers, I have tried to find your husband; now I am convinced he is dead, I desire you to take another bridegroom, to bestow a father on your

THE DOVE THAT
FLEW OVER THE WALL

into blessings. Sons will uphold my rights. Now, take this gap in the wall, for instance. If Gryllus and Critias had sustained my suit the city would have repaired it long ago. Am I to blame for careless driving? What is it to me that it was a sacred car that broke the bricks? If a city can afford processions it can afford to pay for the damage that they cause. So I said then, and so I repeat—

CLEA

Yes, so you repeat.

CLEON

Now, give me a popular and well-known son-in-law like Gryllus, and you'll see the masons here within a week. Come, pluck up heart; your father pleads, your sister pines unwedded, the bridegroom waits, and—the wall needs mending.

Enter GRYLLUS, *from right*

GRYLLUS *to* CLEON

Health, father! (*To* CLEA.) I have brought you these. They were my mother's. (*Gives her a casket.*)

CLEA

I would that she herself could have given them to some happy girl.

GRYLLUS

She could not give them to a fairer one. You do not care to look at them?

CLEA, *putting the casket aside*

I would rather talk to you.

CLEON

That's the first civil thing she has said to him. I'll leave them by themselves. Battaros! Battaros! (*Claps his hands.*)

Enter BATTAROS. CLEON *seats himself under the arbor on left, and looks over the lists that* BATTAROS *presents to him.*

ECHO

Charmides, come back—come back!

GRYLLUS

That is the only piece of your property that I ask you to leave here.

CLEA

As you will. The bird but voices the cry of my heart.

GRYLLUS

I will teach it another call.

CLEA

It is too old and dull to learn.

GRYLLUS

Do you not fear the anger of Aphrodite, inhuman one?

CLEA

No; the marriage gods protect a faithful wife.

GRYLLUS

But not a cruel widow.

CLEA

It is you who are cruel to give me that name.

GRYLLUS

I ask no better than to call you wife.

CLEA

A reluctant one? Have you no pride?

GRYLLUS

Can pride and love find room in the same heart? Pride? Clea, I have bathed your threshold with my tears; I have watched like a chained slave beside your door; I have courted your father, pampered your nurse, flattered your porter, and caressed your dog—

ECHO

Donkeys to sell—donkeys! Shut up, shut up!

GRYLLUS *stops and frowns*

CLEA, *smiling*

But you have not propitiated my parrot. Gryllus, listen; it is not yet too late. Have pity on yourself, on your own blooming youth. Do not take an unloving wife to your warm, young heart. Renounce me, give me up. I am like a funeral urn, without well turned enough and fairly colored, but within filled with tears and ashes.

GRYLLUS

The love that fires my heart will dry the tears and kindle the ashes into flame.

CLEA

Have mercy, Gryllus; let me go.

GRYLLUS

Have pity on me, Clea, as you hope for pity. You speak as though I could choose in this matter. I did not elect to love you. Do I control the hammering of this smithy in my side? Do I regulate the tumult in my veins? You ask me to renounce you as you would beg a pet quail of me. You fancy that you love—

CLEA

I fancy, Gryllus!

GRYLLUS

You would not plead with the gasping runner to turn back when, with weak knees and thundering heart, he gains the goal;

you would not dare to ask the jaded wrestler, when he grips his adversary for a final throw, to loose his clutch; and yet you—

CLEA

Beseech your clemency for your own self. It were better for you to bid the furies to your wedding feast than to drive me to despair.

GRYLLUS

What! In a rage? I like you better so. The ashes still glow, Clea.

CLEA

Ah, no. Alcestis, newly wrested from the tomb, cold with the awful dews of death, was not more chill to mortal touch than I shall be to you, Gryllus.

GRYLLUS

Her husband's arms warmed her to life again.

CLEA, *rising impatiently with a groan*

O, immortal gods, who will deliver me from this man?

ECHO, *startled*

Charmides, Charmides, come back, come back!

CLEON *silences the parrot, and then turning to* GRYLLUS

CLEON

Have you finished your billing; remember the bride isn't dressed yet.

GRYLLUS

One moment, father. (*To* CLEA.) I tender you the olive branch, while you, with that sharp sword you wear between your lips, still stab a heart that loves you, even while you pray for mercy. You suffer, so do I; let the sense of your own pain make you more pitiful. Reflect a little on my torments. You have never sighed for one whose every thought is given to another.

CLEA

No; nor do I understand such fierce love. If not madness, it is sheer self-will.

GRYLLUS

Of course you do not understand it; sooner could you perform the feats of the Pentathlon. A woman's puny side could never hold a heart like mine. Madness! Why, so it is. I could almost believe that you had spun my brain round on a magic wheel and scorched my heart before a witch's fire. Have you not brewed a philtre for my drinking? But no, you are your own enchantment.

CLEA

Go sing that fustian under some flute-player's window. Am I one who consorts with sorcerers? But you *are* changed. You used to be a modest lad, as shy and silent as you were strong. Now fame has come to you, and all those crowns,

and turned your head, not I, with magic wheels. Potions! Why, your training-diet (ugh! those masses of red meat!) has fevered your blood. Nowadays you are more of a fighting-cock than a man. It is to the man that I appeal.

GRYLLUS

And the man's answer is most reasonable. Clea, you do not love me, but you are my promised wife. Forbear to strive weakly with me. I will not understand denial; I am armed against refusal. Such love as mine o'erleaps all your defences and overwhelms your feebler resolution. On your dear head I swear to be a tender father to your child, a helpful son to Cleon. I will sustain your scorn with far more patience than one who loves you less tempestuously. Then, should I renounce you, Cleon would still find you another mate who might be less kind to your boy, less dutiful to your father, less known to Athens and to Greece than Gryllus.

CLEA

I see the athlete has not forgotten the sophist's lessons. I am silenced, not reconciled.

GRYLLUS

Be silent, then, and yield to stronger wills.

CLEA

I do, for my child's sake.

GRYLLUS

It is three long hours before I come for you. Farewell. (*To* CLEON.) Father, we have finished our conference.

CLEA *to* GRYLLUS

Conqueror, I salute you. What a noble victory you have gained over the defenceless! Burn your Pythian chaplets; to-day's exploit outshines all your past triumphs. Go in state to thank the gods for this most glorious conquest. Fare you well.

(*Exit* CLEA)

CLEON

I fear you found her somewhat fanciful.

GRYLLUS, *smiling*

Father, I'd scorn to win a prize without a contest. Her resistance heaps sulphur on my flame. I'm for the Acropolis; give me your company.

CLEON

The gods go with you! I have much to do, and have already sacrificed at daybreak. Farewell, my son.

GRYLLUS

We'll meet at dinner. No, don't attend me; spare ceremony.

ALWAYS GRIEVING

(*Exeunt* CLEON *and* GRYLLUS)

Reënter CLEON, *leading in* AMPHIONE *by the ear*

CLEON

For shame! How often have I told you that the door of the women's apartment is the boundary set for a maiden? A little further and you would have been in the street. To have you shy and retiring I must chain you like a slave.

AMPHIONE

Why were women born with feet? Why were they not made like eels until their fathers find husbands for them? If you spoil my ear, you must add another farm to my dower.

CLEON

No prating! You would confound Socrates himself. Eels, indeed! Here's a model for you, gadabout. (*Taking up a small turtle from the flower-bed.*) Here's an example for all modest women: she's always in her house, you see—a home-keeping female this.

AMPHIONE

And so would I be if I had a face like that! (*Taking the turtle.*) You are convinced that turtles are patterns of domestic virtue—all turtles?

CLEON, *warily*

Um—well, yes.

AMPHIONE

Battaros, Battaros, come and take father's mantle and split up his cane for firewood. Father, you'll hang your shoes in the temple of Aphrodite Urania.

CLEON

What nonsense is this?

AMPHIONE

You said all turtles were examples to be imitated, therefore you'll keep me company here, for virtuous Mistress Turtle never leaves her house because Mr. Turtle stays at home, too.

CLEON

What a pitiful jest! (*Pinching* AMPHIONE*'s cheek.*) If you tease your husband as much as you worry your father, I shall have you on my hands again inside of a fortnight.

AMPHIONE

And you will miss your plague so much that you will be glad to have her back again, whereas if I were really a good, thrifty housekeeper you would be offering sacrifices to be rid of me.

CLEON

Is this another pleasantry? Am I expected to ask why?

AMPHIONE

Because a notable housewife is worse than a gadfly. She must always be reproving; fault-finding is her business, reprehension is her pleasure. She awakes to cavil, goes to table to upbraid the cook, and after having rebuked and reprimanded all day, retires still objurgating and scolds on in her sleep.

CLEON

What a paragon! I wish I had such an one to regulate my household. Come, bustle, bustle! There are a thousand things to do. Where is your sister?

AMPHIONE

Gone to the temple with Doris.

CLEON

Have the girls been to Calirrhoe?

AMPHIONE

Long since, and the cook has come. Praxilla has given him the honey for the cakes, and is weighing the spices. Father, when I am married we shall bake honey-cakes every day.

CLEON

Would you were wedded and eating them now! How can I go through this twice? You must help dress your sister, and, child of tardiness, see to it that you are both ready in time! Prodigies happen occasionally. Keep an eye on the wreaths, and stay on your own side of the house when Parthenis and the singing-girls arrive. And don't look out of the window, Amphione. You have worn holes in the window-seat with your elbows.

AMPHIONE

Well, would you rather that the window-seat had worn holes in my elbows?

CLEON

Hush, hush! Now, what are you waiting for? Have you lead in your sandals. (ECHO, *excited by* CLEON'S *rapid utterance, punctuates his speech with ear-piercing shrieks.*) Can you keep your mind with that ill-omened bird here? I devote its head to the infernal gods!

AMPHIONE, *running to the cage and soothing* ECHO

Hush, pretty one! Be quiet, parrot of my heart, and you shall have a bit of cake when dinner is over. No, no; don't mention donkeys, for father is here; that's a sweeting!

CLEON

You would wheedle the very bird off his perch. In with you!

(*Exeunt* CLEON *and* AMPHIONE)

Enter CHARMIDES, *by the breach in the wall, wrapped in a cloak, with a travelling-hat drawn over his eyes*

ECHO, *fluttering his wings*

Welcome, Charmides! Come back! Come back!

CHARMIDES *starts, looks hastily around, and steps into the arbor as* PARTHENIS *and the singing-girls, followed by two water-bearers, enter from door on right. The water-bearers leave their empty jars on the left near the fountain, and begin to decorate the porch by festooning heavy wreaths of laurel and myrtle from pillar to pillar.*

Enter PRAXILLA, *her arms full of flowers*

PRAXILLA

When you have finished, set these lilies closely about the fountain, and then come to me. The altars of the household gods should be freshly crowned. (*To* PARTHENIS.) You have the names all pat now?

(*Exit* PRAXILLA)

FIRST SINGING-GIRL

We know them well, don't we, Parthenis; especially the bridegroom's?

SECOND SINGING-GIRL

Cat! Don't torment her.

FIRST SINGING-GIRL

We remember Gryllus's name, though he has forgotten ours. Times are changed.

SECOND SINGING-GIRL

You will make her cry, and that will spoil her playing. One can't sob into a flute.

PARTHENIS, *with an air of indifference, unwraps her musical instruments*

FIRST WATER-BEARER

You know Gryllus, then?

SECOND SINGING-GIRL

Do we? We sang at the supper which the city gave him after he returned from the games. That *was* a day! You should have seen him in his purple cloak driving through the big, ragged breach in the town wall. The cheering—you could hear it at the Peiræus—had maddened the horses, and the chariot danced, but he was as unmoved and smiling as he was later in the Prytaneium.

SECOND WATER-BEARER

And you sang the ode?

FIRST SINGING-GIRL

Fairly well. We had scant time for practice; he gave us each a bracelet, but Parthenis's was the prettiest.

FIRST WATER-BEARER

I suppose he is a great man, but I can't realize it, because he is so pleasant and so kind to us all here.

SECOND SINGING-GIRL

That's because he is quite daft now. He'll be masterful enough by and by. He's one of the sort that throw everything into a wife's lap at first, and a month later will keep the key of the store-closet and measure out the wine.

SECOND WATER-BEARER

I can't believe it of him. Why, I have seen him stand for hours, motionless as his own statue on the Altis, watching what he thought was the window of our mistress's room. He miscalculated, though, and kept his vigil under the one where old Doris was snoring, with her wig off.

SECOND WATER-BEARER

He gave Praxilla two drachmæ for an old fillet of—

PARTHENIS, *breaking her flute and throwing it down*

I can't bear any more, and I won't play at his wedding—there!

(*She rushes out by door on right*)

SECOND SINGING-GIRL

Poor Parthenis! You've pricked her sorely with your needle tongues. Now, Mother Philenis will give her a beating. Come, let's go after her.

FIRST SINGING-GIRL

By the Two Goddesses! I meant no harm. She must learn not to cling to a man like a limpet to a rock.

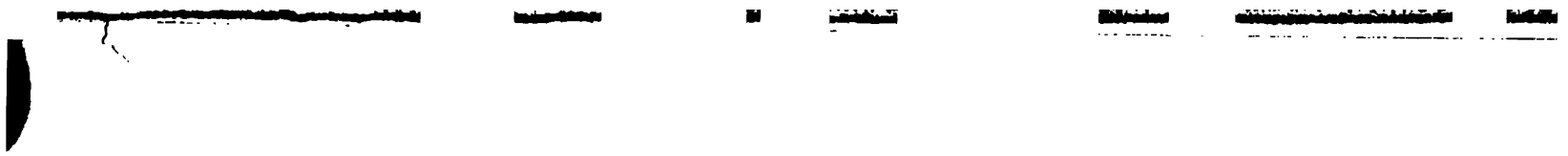
Enter DORIS, *carrying lamps*

DORIS

Not finished yet? You'll not fever your blood with overmuch haste. Are you waiting for the sun to warm your backs? I know a quicker way. Your jaws must ache. It isn't work that tires you! Growl as much as you please, but trim and light these lamps at once. And you, singing birds, what are you doing here?

SECOND WATER-BEARER

Please, Doris, they have been teasing the flute-player, and she has run away.



DORIS

Now, aid us, Adrasteia! After her, you grasshoppers! I'll make you sing a lamentation. Out, out, or I'll write your score on your shoulders with my stick!

(*Exeunt the singing-girls in haste on right*)

DORIS

What are you staring at? Can't you gape and work at the same time? Hurry! The lamps are wanted for to-day's wedding, not for next season's Thesmophoria. And don't fill them as though you were pouring a libation, and beware of looking so long for lovers in the wicks that the bridegroom will lose his way in the dark.

(*Exit* DORIS, *muttering and shaking her head*)

FIRST WATER-BEARER

By Artemis! I would rather meet Empusa any day than that old hag. She grows worse and worse.

They trim and light the lamps

FIRST WATER-BEARER

We should look for signs in them to-night. Eunoa, see the lump in this wick. What does that stand for?

SECOND WATER-BEARER

What you'll never get—a husband.

FIRST WATER-BEARER

No; it means that we may expect a stranger.

SECOND WATER-BEARER

O wise soothsayer! Dozens of them are invited to the banquet.

CHARMIDES, *stepping out of the arbor and approaching the startled girls*

Do not be frightened, but tell your master that a traveler from Catana would speak with him.

FIRST WATER-BEARER

A traveler from Sicily is always sure of a welcome in this house. (*Aside, nudging her companion.*) That's he. Now, is not the lamp a true prophet?

SECOND WATER-BEARER

He? Who? The husband you are always looking for?

FIRST WATER-BEARER

No; the stranger, of course.

(*Exeunt by door on right*)

CHARMIDES *throws back his cloak and takes off the petasos*

Enter AMPHIONE *from right.* CHARMIDES *clasps her in his arms*

CHARMIDES

Clea, my own Clea! Don't you recognize me? Am I so changed?

AMPHIONE, *struggling*

You are Charmides or his ghost, but I am Amphione.

CHARMIDES, *releasing her*

Is it possible! Little Amphione grown so tall! Where is my wife? (*Goes towards the house door.*)

AMPHIONE, *detaining him*

Stop—wait a moment, let me draw breath. We thought you were dead, Charmides; you are like one come back from the dim underworld. The shock—the sudden joy after long years of mourning have turned me faint; they may kill Clea. You are like a shade, my brother; where have you been all these years? Oh, why didn't you send us one little word?

CHARMIDES

Where have I been? In Tartarus, little sister. I am indeed a shade. Why did I not send you word? That's pertinent—a timely question. In the quarries they did not supply us with tablets, so I could not write home from them. Later, I was sold, with other worn-out cattle, to a Syracusan miller. From his mill, where I ground corn, I could have written with a straw filched from the manger of my fellow-laborer, a galled ass whose shoulders were not more raw than mine, and for ink, there was the blood from my back, but I lacked a messenger, Amphione.

AMPHIONE

My poor Charmides!

CHARMIDES, *taking her hand*

Clea is well? She still mourns for me, you say?

AMPHIONE

She dwells with your memory. (*Aside.*) Oh, what can I do?

CHARMIDES

Then fetch her, fetch her—or let me seek her.

AMPHIONE

I will. Patience, I beseech you! You understand, Charmides, we have sought you for years, and now—we thought

you dead—this is the first time that this sad house has held a feast since the fleet sailed. To-day—oh, pardon, dear, it was for no want of love, I do assure you—she was overruled, and I am much to blame.

CHARMIDES, *smiling*

Why? Because you have a wedding here without waiting for my return? Poor child, it was most natural; my only wonder is that you should have tarried so long.

AMPHIONE

Charmides, we are unworthy of your forgiveness. How *did* you know?

CHARMIDES

I heard the slave-girls' chatter. But why does the bride wear white roses in her cheeks? What troubles her?

AMPHIONE

The surprise—your return—why—of course I am the bride. They told you so?

CHARMIDES

I guessed as much. Now let us go to Clea.

AMPHIONE

She is here.

AMPHIONE, *placing her finger on her lip, hurries* CHARMIDES *into the arbor, and then joins* CLEA *at the door*

Enter CLEA *from right, accompanied by* PRAXILLA, *carrying a jewel-casket, and* DORIS, *holding a case of cosmetics in one hand and an oil-jar in the other.*

CLEA *seats herself in the chair, and* PRAXILLA *opens the casket*

CLEA

Let me breathe a little before I fasten my fetters. There is a strange heaviness in the air. Amphione, how pale you are! These perfumes are too heavy. (*She motions away the case which* DORIS *offers her.*)

DORIS

You would both be the better for a touch from my box. Your bath was too cold, mistress, or your prayers were too long; you have gone white as the Hermes yonder.

CLEA

Yes, I have tired the gods with unanswered supplications. I have hoped even until now for some sign from them, but they are as pitiless as men—

AMPHIONE

Clea, hush! I have news for you—a stranger just arrived from Catana—

CLEA, *gasping and trembling*

And you have held him in talk long enough to learn this without warning me? Charmides is alive?

AMPHIONE

Rejoice! He is.

CLEA, *rising*

Is he well? Is he wounded? Is he sick, in prison, in slavery? Does he send for ransom? Tell me—one word if you are in truth, my sister. No—silence! Bring this stranger here, that I may question him and bless him, and fall at his feet and offer sacrifice to him as though he were a god.

AMPHIONE

Softly, softly, Clea. You are reserving nothing for Charmides himself. Dismiss your women.

(*Exit* DORIS *and* PRAXILLA)

I'll fetch the man.

AMPHIONE *crosses to the arbor, and leads out* CHARMIDES, *muffled in his cloak*

CLEA

His step! (*Runs towards him and falls at his feet. He raises and enfolds her in his arms.*)

A silence

AMPHIONE *steals out by the porch door*

CHARMIDES, *slowly putting* CLEA *away from him and looking at her*

So like and so unlike the face I held between my eyelids in the glare of the quarry, in the blinding dust of the mill. That was the treasure which they could not wrest from the famished slave. And yet after a little space, do what I would, the color paled, the lines wavered into haze. Were you so tall, and was this arm which warms my throat so round four years ago? Speak to me—speak, if you are not some treacherous dream.

CLEA

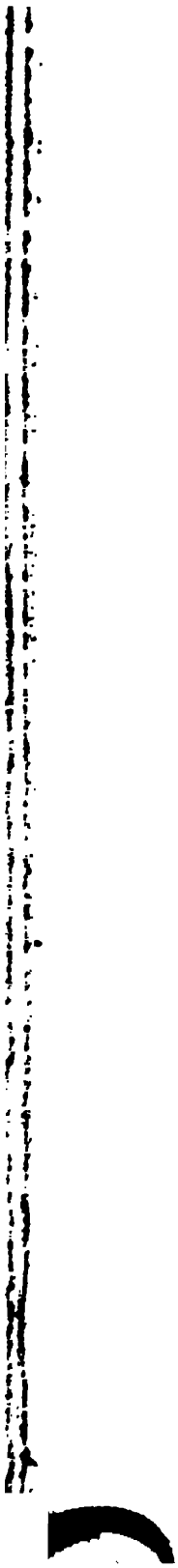
I cannot. Bliss is mute.

CHARMIDES

Let me taste it, then, hearing your voice. Tell me—what indeed I know—that you love me—me the scarred captive, the branded slave—as you once did your bridegroom?

CLEA

No, I do not love you as I loved you then, but ten thousand thousand times as much; indeed, my life, I never really loved you till this moment.



THE WATER-CARRIERS

CHARMIDES

Sweet sophist, your affection was my only reason for living. For years I have fought Death when my comrades called on him, because I had promised you to return.

CLEA

Love, I will make your life so sweet that you will not regret your hard-won victory. How you have suffered! I see your past torments in your wasted face, and this dear arm, once strong as a young tree, has scarcely strength to hold me. Oh, my love, my love, how could they hurt you!

CHARMIDES

I am much changed, I know; nay, be frank with me. Clea, I have been branded like a beast, scourged like the slave I was, harnessed to millstones, driven around with blows, and muzzled, that in the extremity of my hunger I might not devour the raw flour that I ground.

CLEA

Oh, pity—stop! My heart, inured to sorrow as it is, is not framed to bear the thought of your misery.

CHARMIDES

But it is over now—no, not quite; such agonies of flesh and spirit leave scars on mind and heart. Such outward degrada-

tion may not debase, but it embitters. It is a defeated soldier, a broken, melancholy man that I bring back to you, my wife.

CLEA

Pardon me, my dear lord. It is as conqueror that you return. Have you not, like Alcmena's son, wrestled with Death and triumphed? If you have lost the light heart of youth, have you not won the virtues of the hero: patience, fortitude, and an unwavering will? I shall be too proud of such a husband; dear gods, what good thing have I done that you should give so much?

CHARMIDES, *kissing her*

What balm there is in those soft lips! They charm my wretchedness; but, Clea, your hero has been branded, and on his scored back is written slave until he dies.

CLEA

Would you be more than a god, Charmides? Was not Herakles beaten, and did not Apollo drudge in the house of Admetus? Do you come to a poor, ignorant girl, who has never been taught the wisdom of the schools, to be told that your dauntless spirit, the real Charmides, was always a free man?

CHARMIDES

What a wise little person you have grown to be! Has Socrates brought his demon to your father's house?

CLEA

Love is my master, Charmides.

CHARMIDES

Love is not stern enough to play the pedagogue.

CLEA

Mine was the wingless Eros of Anacreon; have you forgotten the old song of the love that forges the soul as the smith does his iron, tempering it in flame and steeping it in icy waters after many blows?

CHARMIDES

That belongs to a sunny past which is slowly coming back to me. My blows have left tangible furrows, Clea.

CLEA, *embracing him*

Every scar on that beloved flesh cries out to me. Your wounds are mouths which testify to faithful love and unfaltering endurance. You wear them nobly, Charmides.

CHARMIDES

Why, sweet, almost you persuade me—but in my new-found happiness I am forgetting Amphione's wedding. I am but a sorry marriage guest.

CLEA *starting*

Amphione's?

CHARMIDES

Yes: I shall startle you all. I must borrow a wedding garment. Go you first, my love, and smooth the way for me—I shall strike terror in her household.

CHARMIDES *muffles himself in his cloak again.* CLEA *in a hurried way, leads him towards the house. At the porch door they are met by* BATTARUS *and* AMPHIONE, *who carries a veil in her arm.*

BATTARUS, *bowing down and kissing* CHARMIDES's *hand*

Rejoice, my master!

AMPHIONE

That's sensible. Don't uncover your face. Battarus has made your bath ready, and your new clothes—Clea has kept them in beautiful order. Charmides—are strong. Make haste and join us here when you are dressed.

CHARMIDES

You are already a bustling housekeeper, Amphione.

AMPHIONE

The gods avert it! Now, go, Charmides. Clea must stay here. The bride needs her. Go, go: it's not for another four years that you are leaving her.

(*Exeunt* BATTAROS *and* CHARMIDES)

AMPHIONE

Clea, wake up! You have been dreaming long enough; action is now imperative. I have done what I could, but father was gossiping outside, and paid no attention to my messages. Does Charmides know? About you and Gryllus I mean, of course.

CLEA

Fool that I was, I forgot everything else when I saw his face.

AMPHIONE

Who would think you were my elder! Now, *I* had presence of mind enough to fib to him immediately. You are saved, Clea, by the astuteness of your younger sister.

CLEA

I am too bewildered to follow you.

AMPHIONE

I told him that it was *my* wedding day.

CLEA

To what purpose?

AMPHIONE

To shield you, marble-head. Hera aid us! Can't you understand that if we can get rid of Gryllus, and send for Lysis in time, we can have a wedding after all, and Charmides will never know that it was to have been yours?

CLEA

I cannot deceive him, and yet I would rather die than tell him. He has already endured so much. O my child, what shall I do!

AMPHIONE

Trust to me; the child will arrange everything. Here comes father. We must break the news to him discreetly. Now be tactful, Clea.

Enter CLEON *by porch door*

CLEON

You wanted to see me. I haven't a moment to spare. Where's the man from Catana?

AMPHIONE, *motioning to* CLEA *to be quiet*

In the house, taking a bath.

CLEON

Before seeing me! That seems informal.

AMPHIONE

I sent him to the guest-chamber with Battaros.

CLEON

Since when has it been your duty to receive strange travellers?

AMPHIONE

You were not here. I sent for you.

CLEA, *putting her hand on* CLEON'S *shoulder*

He brought us joyful news, father, but there will be no wedding here.

AMPHIONE, *taking her father's hand*

Oh, yes, there will be! Clea, you are spoiling everything. *I* will take Clea's place, father, and none of the cakes will be wasted.

CLEA

Cannot we send immediately for Gryllus, father?

AMPHIONE

No; we must despatch a messenger to Lysis first.

CLEA

Letting him know that there is no marrying for him to-day.

AMPHIONE

Bidding him prepare to be married at once.

CLEA

You are mixing up matters, Amphione. Gryllus should be informed first, or he will be affronted.

AMPHIONE

And you are bewildering father, Clea. Lysis should be informed first, or he may not be prepared.

CLEA

But he is coming in any case.

AMPHIONE

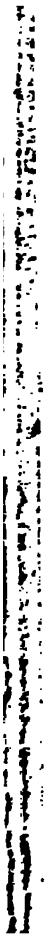
And so is Gryllus.

CLEA, *drawing* CLEON *towards her*

Surely it is most important to warn an expectant bridegroom that he is not to be married, after all.

AMPHIONE, *pulling* CLEON *away from* CLEA

It is indubitably more urgent to warn an unsuspecting boy that he is to be married immediately.



PARTHENIS

CLEA, *releasing* CLEON

Do as you please, then, for we can't waste time in discussion. The names in the hymeneal chorus must be changed.

AMPHIONE

And the porter must be instructed to inform the wedding guests who is to wed which, and to dispel their former misconceptions.

CLEA

And the flower-girls sent to Critias's house!

CLEON *during this rapid dialogue has looked in amazement from one daughter to the other. Still holding them both by the hand, he now marches to the door on right.*

CLEON

No, girls, there will be no wedding to-day; instead, we'll start instantly for the shrine of Esculapius. You are both out of your wits.

AMPHIONE

Father, let me explain.

CLEA

No, permit me to—

CLEON

No; you are too mad to answer a straight question. I don't even know which Clea wants to marry, Critias or Lysis, or

why Amphione has decided to appropriate Gryllus. I am in a maze, and shall soon be as crazy as you are. Come!

AMPHIONE

Hear me first. Father, brace your nerves against a shock.

CLEON

Your advice is belated.

AMPHIONE, *rapidly*

Father Charmides has returned he was in the quarries first and has been a slave and didn't have time to tell me how he escaped but he had promised Clea to come back you remember and kept it and arrived just now and is dressing and will be here in a moment and of course Clea can't wed Gryllus now and we can't tell Charmides how cruelly we have compelled her to do so—can we, dear?—and it must be kept secret mustn't it and I offer to take her place and be married to-day to Lysis if you can persuade him on such short notice and none of the flowers and food will be spoiled and you won't have had all this trouble for nothing and Critias should be told too and I'll trouble you to arrange my veil Clea please.

CLEON

Charmides has returned! Why, how—how—

CLEA

Wonderful, is it not?

CLEON

I call it inconsiderate.

CLEA

Father!

CLEON

But to-day—of all days—without any warning—

CLEA

Not another word until you hear his story; then you will regret even the few you have uttered.

CLEON

Are you quite sure that it was he? There have been frauds —substitutions. (CLEA *turns from him in indignation.*) Don't be vexed. I am charmed to welcome Charmides, but you will admit that the situation is an awkward one. It's all very well for you, but it is hard on me. Lovers are always selfish. I forfeit Gryllus's influence, perhaps even his friendship—

AMPHIONE

You will lose that of Charmides also when he learns that you forced Clea to remarry. You should not reproach us with selfishness; for your sake we have tried to conceal it from him.

CLEON

That was considerate, chuck. Frankly, I didn't expect it of either of you. Now I begin to understand the nature of the

suggestions which you urged upon me so strenuously. If you had only begun your story at the right end I should have been a more intelligent auditor. I'll follow your instructions. If we only had more time! Keep Charmides away for a little while, and I'll answer for everything. Now for the messages.

(*Exit* CLEON, *hastily, on right*)

AMPHIONE

Now, Clea, quick, my veil! (CLEA *fastens the gauze scarf on* AMPHIONE'S *hair.*) Battaros! (*Clapping her hands.*) Battaros! Why doesn't he come? (*Enter* BATTAROS.) Battaros, be as slow as you can in dressing your master, and when he is quite ready break a jar of unguent on his himation,—nard spots badly,—and don't find him another mantle too quickly. Tell him how old Cerdon brought the sandals home only last year which were ordered before the fleet sailed; suggest sending to Sporgilus's shop for a barber; keep him occupied a few minutes. You understand?

(BATTAROS *nods and goes out*)

CLEA

Amphione, I can't consent to this deception. It breaks my heart to lie to him.

AMPHIONE

You would rather break *his.* What barbarous probity! It is your duty to save him pain. Think of what he has already suffered.

CLEA

I do; indeed, I do.

AMPHIONE

Then be quiet, and let father and me perjure ourselves in peace. How do I look?

CLEA

Like a little girl with her mother's veil on.

AMPHIONE

I am in truth a naïve little girl to expect a compliment from a member of my own family.

Enter GRYLLUS *from right*

GRYLLUS

Is it true? Has Charmides returned? Speak!

CLEA

My husband is here.

GRYLLUS

Then this is no place for your lover. I will not remain to blight your joy. Farewell, Clea; in your felicity you have the measure of my misery.

CLEA

Stay, Gryllus; stay and be an honored guest at my sister's wedding feast.

GRYLLUS

No, Clea, no: I have no appetite. The spectacle of your bliss would poison my meat. Farewell! Be happy and forget Gryllus, who would willingly have made you so.

CLEA

Farewell. Good fortune attend you!

GRYLLUS

May the blessed immortals hear you! But what is left for one to whom Aphrodite is adverse?

CLEA

The wild-olive crown at Olympia.

GRYLLUS *smiles, sighs, and leaps over the wall*

Enter CHARMIDES

AMPHIONE

Already!

CHARMIDES, *going to* CLEA

At last! I have been as long in dressing as an over-ripe coquette. Everything went wrong, and Battaros has grown such a clumsy fellow! He used to be adroit, but to-day he did nothing but break and spill things.

AMPHIONE

It was emotion, Charmides.

CLEA *shakes her finger at* AMPHIONE

AMPHIONE

You will be the king of our feast; nobody will notice the poor, insignificant bride, and you will have to give us a public recital of your adventures—

CHARMIDES

If you think I'll dim your splendor, let me sup in private with Clea. I ask nothing better.

AMPHIONE

How unselfish of you! No, we count on your story, and have dismissed a juggler and a pair of dancers in consequence. Odysseus will have a clear course.

CHARMIDES

Who will want to hear poor Odysseus, when he can look at Nausicaa?

CLEA

Remember, Charmides, you have not even told us how you found your way here. We, too, shall be questioned.

AMPHIONE

He hasn't told you? What were you talking of all that time?

CLEA

You will know when you have been a wife a week.

CHARMIDES

If I am to recount my Odyssey later, spare me now. Tell me, in your turn, why is our wall so battered?

AMPHIONE *and* CLEA *laugh*

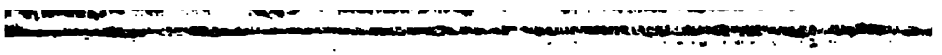
It made my heart sink. I feared that some misfortune had befallen your father's house.

CLEA

It's a question of principle with father. *You* will have the wall mended, my love, and set a votive tablet in the gap there. Here's father.

Enter CLEON, CRITIAS, *and* LYSIS *in white, with garlands on their heads*

LYSIS *and* CRITIAS *greet* CHARMIDES. AMPHIONE *and* LYSIS *salute each other joyously*



IN CLEON'S GARDEN

CLEON, *embracing* CHARMIDES

Rejoice, my son! The girls have told me all—no, now I think of it, I don't even know how you got here. I shall be assailed with questions. Give me a hint before the guests arrive. Begin at the end.

CHARMIDES

It will take too long. Let it suffice you to know how I escaped from the Syracusan miller. My fellow drudge, having no such reason for living as I possessed, died, overdone, one evening. His poor shell, covered with a rag of sacking, was to be cast out with the other husks and ashes at night. I laid it on my straw and took its place. A blear-eyed slave, half blinded by the smoke from the ovens, unknowing, carted me to the mounds beyond the city walls. On the road he lost part of his freight. When, a month later, I found myself in Catana (I will not linger on the itinerary), where the poor remnant of our army had found a refuge, I fell sick. For weeks I lay like a dead man. Later, when I struggled back to life, the generosity of a handful of my old soldiers, who had taken service with the Catanians, sent me home in a little bark which, favored by Athene, escaped the pirates. I'll swear that I was the first man ashore.

CLEON, *patting* CHARMIDES'S *shoulder*

Well done, my son! Why, man, how thin you are! Never mind, you'll soon be sleek again. We'll stuff you like a wres-

tler. (*To* CRITIAS.) You can't kill these boys. Ah! Youth —youth, always prized too late! Call no man unhappy who is young.

CLEON, CHARMIDES, *and* CRITIAS *talk together.* LYSIS *joins them*

AMPHIONE *to* CLEA, *after leaving* LYSIS, *with whom she has been chatting*

Sister, don't you think that we might put it off until next week—or to-morrow?

CLEA

Put off what?

AMPHIONE

My wedding.

CLEA

Now help us, Adrasteia! What's the matter?

AMPHIONE

I feel limp: hear my heart thump, Clea. Marriage is very solemn; it did not seem so near until just now.

CLEA

My dear, that's nothing; those are common tremors; one never enjoys one's own wedding. I was far worse than you.

AMPHIONE

To leave you all! To go alone to that strange house! Clea, if Praxilla felt as I do, I should say that she was afraid. No, no, no; I can't be married to-day!

CLEA, *quietly*

Very well. You shall stay here. I will explain to Lysis that you have made a mistake, and on reflection you have discovered that you don't care for him enough to be his wife. You can start this evening for Megara to visit your Aunt Leucippe until father is pacified. Let me undo your veil. (*Sighs.*) Poor Lysis!

AMPHIONE

Don't touch my veil yet. You think Lysis will mind very much?

CLEA, *smiling*

Yes—for a while; but he is young and proud, and his handsome neighbor, the rich armorer's only daughter, is admirably fitted to console him. Don't trouble yourself. I think he will soon be resigned.

AMPHIONE, *resolutely*

She is quite incapable of making him happy. Pin on that veil firmly, please. I may shake, but I am going to keep my word.

CLEA, *very gravely*

Yes, dear, you will; for *I* can endure this deception no longer, and I must confess it to Charmides. Hush! not one word; I cannot do otherwise. (*She goes to the group of men.*) Charmides, we have deceived you. I am a faithless wife. A passive tool in others' hands, still believing that you were alive, still doting on you, I yielded to incessant importunity, and this wedding day was to have been mine—yes, mine!

A silence

CHARMIDES

I thought I knew what agony was. Poor fool! I never felt it till now. This treachery is crueller than stripes—Clea faithless. But that is such a new thought; if I accept it I uproot all lesser convictions. With that conclusion I must reconstruct my theory of life. Was it so difficult—here in this pleasant place, with flowers and blessed sunshine, and kind faces all about you—to be constant? If I had only known! I could have died so easily. (*To* CLEON.) I thank you, Cleon, for your entertainment. It was handsomely done, the cheat you put upon the tattered skeleton, the kill-joy who came to life so inopportunely. How I startled you, and how you must have hurried and wriggled! How admirably you drilled your household to feign—at such short notice, too! The kind looks, the hearty greetings, they were shams also, and the warm handclasps were no less fraudulent? Liars, liars, all of you! Cleon, dishonoring your white beard; perjured Amphione, with those clear eyes; and Clea, who deceived me even while her heart

beat on mine. It hurts too much! The comedy is over now, and the spectator, having duly praised the actors and their piece, may take his leave. Not without paying, though; I'll be munificent. (*To* CLEON, *and touching* CLEA'S *arm.*) Here's something that I prized more than my own soul; I'll leave it with you. The piece is false, but with care and a little shuffling it may be passed again. (CHARMIDES *turns to go.*)

CLEA, *detaining him*

I cannot be generous, but I would be just. I have a treasure of yours in my keeping which I have forfeited; I would make restitution. Pray wait for me; I'll fetch it.

(*Exit* CLEA *on right*)

CHARMIDES

I cannot stay.

CLEON, *approaching* CHARMIDES

Suffering has warped your judgment. Was it so criminal for me, feeling assured that you were no more, to find another husband for her?

CRITIAS

Indeed, could you expect a young woman to remain a widow in the flowering time of life?

LYSIS, *putting his hand on* CHARMIDES'S *shoulder*

If Clea's sister cherishes me half as much as Clea loves you, I shall be satisfied.

AMPHIONE, *taking* CHARMIDES'S *hand*

Brother, you shall not go till you have heard the truth. (*To* LYSIS *and* CLEON.) You are too cold. If I had learned like you to speak, to plead, to make even the worse cause appear the better, I would be eloquent now. Clea did not love you, she adored you; you were *of* her—her very being; call her slaves, and they will testify how her thoughts never strayed from your image. (*Calling.*) Praxilla! Doris!

CHARMIDES

You need not call them. I will take your word.

LYSIS

Doris and Battaros met every ship with inquiries for you. In this marriage, believe me, Clea was much constrained.

CLEON

We have spent two great talents in offering rewards; in entertaining tramps, refugees, deserters, strangers from Sicily; in searching for you, in fine.

CRITIAS

Clea laid siege to the altars of the gods. You will find votive gifts for you in every temple. Who knows?—you may owe your life to her ceaseless prayers.

AMPHIONE

The very trees and flowers and birds are living proofs of her devotion to you. Look here, and here. (*Shows him his name carved on the tree trunks.*) There's Charmides, spelled out in violets, the flowers you prefer. (*Leads him to the garden-bed.*) Here's a loquacious witness for her. (*Unhooks the parrot's cage and sets it on the chair.*) Tell us, pretty, pretty, *pretty* birdie, what is it Clea taught you—say it, dear Echo.

CHARMIDES

This is too childish; let me go.

AMPHIONE, *on the verge of tears, clinging to his hand, and kneeling beside the cage*

Stay, stay! O Echo, don't be aggravating. (*She fondles the parrot and whispers to him.* ECHO *puts his head on one side and surveys the anxious group about his cage cynically.*) Call Charmides! Oh, how perverse! If we would have him mute he would tire the very air with countless repetitions of your name.

ECHO, *coyly, in a whisper, while they all bend towards him*

Charmides, Charmides, come back to her who loves you. (*Then, in an eldritch shriek.*) Char—Charmides!

The auditors hastily retire from the vicinity of the cage

CRITIAS

An eloquent witness, that. The whole agora could have heard his deposition.

Enter CLEA, *with the small* CLEANTHES, *very pink and sleepy, in her arms. She kneels before* CHARMIDES

You have judged and condemned me. I can make no defence; I bow to your decree of banishment from your loved presence. I am self-sentenced to lose what I hold only less dear than you. Take your son with you, and in pity to me remove him quickly. (*She turns away her head and weeps.*) My punishment is more than I can bear.

She holds out the child to CHARMIDES. *He kneels beside her and receives* CLEANTHES *from her, raises him to his lips and is about to kiss him, but instead replaces him in* CLEA'S *arms and embraces them both.*

CHARMIDES

His mother first.

Kisses CLEA

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